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COMMONWEAL

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Dear Bishops: Face Facts

The following letter, in slightly different form, was sent to all the American Catholic bishops (and to Commonweal *and other publications) in September. The writer, pastor of Saint Edward's Parish in Nashville, Tennessee, also sent copies to a thousand parishioners inviting them "to write to our bishops and encourage them to discuss the issue" addressed in the letter.*

Nashville, Tenn.

Your Excellency:

While observing the problems within the church in these times, many priests and lay people are disappointed and sorrowful as, year after year, problems which desperately need attention are ignored by our bishops. These problems are not going to go away. And the refusal of our spiritual leaders to face the problems allows them to fester, dividing our communities and sapping our strength more and more.

This refusal puts more and more Catholics, and especially the leaders of the flock, into positions where they cannot act with reference to their people's real problems both in good conscience and in conformity with documents issued by the pope or in his name in which he clings to outdated traditions that cannot be maintained in the face of irreversible social and economic changes. Indeed, those traditions fly in the face of *de facto* changes in the manner in which the church operates. No priest or lay person with eyes and ears is unaware of the vast difference between what is said in Rome and what actually happens and is espoused in Catholic parishes and institutions.

All this without significant response from the bishops. One devastating effect of this development is that the authority of the pope and bishops is radically weakened. By extension the authority and credibility of pastors are weakened. A sort of indifference to those authorities has set in, and it is abundantly clear that an incalculably large portion of Catholics, people who consider themselves in good standing in the church and who are treated as though they are, are making their moral decisions without reference to what the established representatives of apostolic authority are saying to them. Such indifference, even though engendered by the people's difficulty with a certain set of contemporary issues, will become habitual and will be at work across the board in moral and doctrinal matters—if indeed that is not already the case.

Sadly, I feel obliged to say to you that the feelings of sorrow and disappointment of which I spoke above have undergone a change. Nowadays, sorrow and disappointment are heavily charged with frustration, even anger. Several issues might be addressed here, but I shall restrict myself to one: the shortage of priests. This condition is especially frustrating because it undermines, in some cases destroys, the ability of a diocese or parish to minister to its people. It is even more angering that the bishops refuse to address the causes of the shortage—angering both to lay people, who know they are not well served, and who in some cases are cheated of their sacramental life, and to priests, who find themselves doomed by circumstances to be ineffective pastors.

In a parish where two or three or even four priests are needed and there is only one, the laity rightly thinks itself ill-served, and the pastor, if he is conscientious, is a likely candidate for physical, mental, and moral exhaustion. When a 150 percent effort is not enough, the temptation for the less conscientious must be to make no more than a token effort: why fight an unwinnable battle? Some pastors are young and inexperienced; some older priests are plagued by poor health and loss of energy. In such situations, people who are interested in a vital religious community and strong pastoral guidance (the very people who are the best prospects for strong lay leadership and who make strong parishes) too often decide that they can meet their spiritual needs and exercise their leadership talents more usefully in a church of another religion....

Our evangelizing efforts are stymied by the shortage of priests. We do little in African-American communities, the needs of whose families cannot be served by priests who drop by once a week to say Mass. The growing Hispanic population of our country is observed to be moving in great numbers to religious bodies which provide them a sense of community and family involvement. Some of the Southeast Asian immigrants to our country (such as some groups of Laotians and Vietnamese) come from long Catholic traditions. Without an adequate number of priests,

(Continued on page 29)

"I realize it's serious, Mr. Panover, but let's dispense with the sign!"

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COMMONWEAL

CONTENTS

Volume CXX, Number 21

Correspondence: 2
Editorials: 3
Cardinal Joseph Bernardin: *Jim Bowman* 5
My quest for wisdom: *David R. Carlin, Jr.* 6
What the losers won: *Abigail McCarthy* 8
Why aren't we in Vietnam?: *James F. O'Brien* 9
How long must we preserve life?: *Thomas A. Shannon* 12
Poetry: *George Held* 14
Screen: *Richard Alleva* 15
Stage: *Gerald Weales* 17
The crisis in biblical scholarship: *Luke Timothy Johnson* 18

BOOKS

Critics' choices for Christmas: *Alice McDermott, Regina Plunkett Dowling, Martin E. Marty, Wilson J. Moses, Nicholas Clifford, Christopher Thomas, E.J. Dionne, Jr., Peggy Ellsberg* 22

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Commonweal *welcomes letters on subjects treated in its pages. Letters of not more than 250 or 300 words naturally have a better chance of being published.*

CNN'S fall from grace

Accusations of sexual abuse against Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago have shocked and saddened many Americans. Bernardin categorically denied the charges contained in a $10-million civil suit filed by Steven Cook. Cook, now thirty-four years old, claimed on TV that when he was seventeen a Cincinnati priest initiated him into homosexuality, that Bernardin sodomized him, and that these experiences led to a life of promiscuity and drug abuse. Cook, who has AIDS, says he recovered the memory of the priest's abuse within the last year, and of Bernardin's within the last month—all of this at least fifteen years after the alleged events.

There is not now and may never be any evidence to judge the veracity of Cook's charges except his alleged recovered memory and the chutzpah displayed by his lawyer, Stephen Rubino. For unlike a criminal indictment, which requires a prosecutor to gather and to present to a grand jury evidence sufficient to warrant prosecution, this is a complaint by which the defendants are put on notice that they are going to be sued. Such lawsuits can be frivolous maneuvers in struggles to win out-of-court settlements and other advantages over an adversary when criminal indictments are unlikely. The complaint in this case does nothing more than repeat Cook's allegations, cite the laws under which the suit has been entered, and ask for a jury trial. Evidence? As of this writing, there is none.

This brings us to CNN (Ted Turner's Cable News Network) which broke the story in an interview with Cook on the morning (Friday, November 12) the complaint was filed; the interview was preceded and followed by Bernardin's denials. Did this scoop show CNN to be supremely enterprising—as in its Gulf War coverage—merely sensationalistic and exploitative, or simply anti-Catholic? The Atlanta-based network followed the Cook interview with an announcement of its previously planned hour-long primetime show, "Fall from Grace," to be broadcast the following Sunday (November 14), the day before the Catholic bishops were to gather for their annual meeting in Washington. "Fall from Grace" was to explore the problem of sexual abuse among priests.

In fact, the program, most of which had been filmed before Cook's accusations were made public, had almost nothing new to report. Nothing, that is, except Cook's accusation which are briefly repeated during the show. Cardinal Bernardin, who has been a leader among the bishops in efforts to change the way the church deals with abuse cases, is made "the star." He is interviewed defending the innovative procedures adopted in Chicago for determining whether there are grounds for accusations against a priest, and whether a priest should be removed from his ministry. Unavoidably, these once largely informational segments—now shown after Bernardin himself has been accused—seem ludicrous, unfeeling, and self-serving. In introducing Bernardin from segment to segment as the bishop who instituted measures to deal with priest pedophilia,

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"Fall from Grace" reiterates the accusations against him at least four times, often using as a verbal bridge the insinuating refrain—"prior to being accused of being an abuser himself."

This concentration on Bernardin was wildly disproportionate. Yes, Catholic priests have abused children, but Bernardin cannot in any fair-minded way be presented as either emblematic of the problem or central to it. But that is the impression the show leaves with the viewer. And there is another, broader insinuation. In sequence after sequence, the reporter narrates the now familiar story of priestly pedophilia over pictures of liturgical events, especially an ordination ceremony. What is the subliminal message? Among the Catholic clergy, hypocrisy is rank and rife.

In one segment, "Fall from Grace" stages an interview with a "recovering" priest-abuser in front of an illuminated stained-glass window. As the priest tells of his pathological compulsion, the camera zooms in on the window's chalice and Communion wafer or on the word "SAINT," alternating these religious symbols with shots of the priests' hands—those defiling hands—held in front of his crotch. Although the abuser and the reporter speak about the psychological nature of his "illness," the visual message draws a connection between the priesthood and its religious trappings (including celibacy) and pedophilia.

Priests and prelates deserve no special treatment from the press. But neither should the press go uncriticized when it fails to balance the competing interests of the public's right to know with its own responsibility to weigh the factual worth of accusations it is considering for public airing. In this case, CNN failed. Its story was not enterprising; it was mostly a rehash. Neither was it *merely* sensationalistic or exploitative. It was, rather, unfair and unprofessional. In no small measure, it depended on the now almost pervasive view that the Catholic church, along with other groups who defend culturally conservative values—especially in matters sexual, reproductive, and familial—is fair game for public pillorying.

We do not share the view that the media and other opinion leaders engage in systematic Catholic bashing. In this case we are persuaded that "Fall from Grace," and other shows like it—for there is a relentlessly repetitive quality to them—suspend their sense of fairness and professional standards. In the case of Catholic priests and clerical sexual abuse, the standard has become "guilty until proven innocent."

On the immediate issue, two points should be made. First, the priest pedophilia story and its repetitive airing (as if the church has made no significant effort to respond to it) can be terribly corrosive for the church itself, perhaps especially to the faith of the young who are hard pressed to admit allegiance to what CNN and other media paint as a corrupt and flamboyantly hypocritical body.

Second and even worse: If CNN's scoop plants the idea that anyone can accuse anyone else of sordid behavior and have the case tried in the press without presenting serious evidence, who will suffer the most in the end? The credibility of victims who have fought long to overcome the denial of church officials is at stake along with the hard-won church processes set in place for examining abuse charges. Victims deserve pastoral attention as well as compensation from the church. But acknowledging past wrongs does not magically change the very complicated problems sexual abuse presents to its victims, to the church, and to those accused. Some conclude more or less automatically that a priest who has been accused must be guilty. Some even argue that the church should not resort to the legal system to defend a priest its own investigation concludes is innocent. But it is a curious logic that insists that legal safeguards for the accused are somehow unchristian. Due process, after all, is something the church needs more of, not less—as the experience of those who have been sexually abused so poignantly shows. Moreover, though seeking legal remedies should in no way be discouraged, victims should also recognize that the recompense they seek and deserve is not easily won from the legal system either.

Were it not for the press, specifically the *National Catholic Reporter*, this story might never have been told and the church never able to admit and come to terms with this terrible scourge. While victims and their advocates feel that there is still a long way to go, they should recognize that the media, in this case CNN, is no longer necessarily an ally in the process of disclosure, acknowledgment, recompense, and reconciliation.

ET CETERA

ASK AND YOU SHALL RECEIVE As you know if you get and read the *Commonweal Associates Newsletter*, the fall issue reported that items from this magazine (and zillions of others, including *Super Teen, Amazing Stories*, and *Walleye In-Sider*) are regularly read over the Radio Talking Book Network, operated by State Services for the Blind in Saint Paul, Minnesota. The *Newsletter*, however, took note that our stuff gets on the air once a week during a religious segment at 6:15 A.M., whereas a program titled "Rated R," which features readings from *Esquire, Penthouse*, and "appropriate books," is scheduled twice a week at 11 P.M.—"presumably because at that hour lovers of *Commonweal* have turned off their radios and are saying their night prayers." The item ended: "But we're not going to complain (*sigh!*), except here. Maybe somebody high in the hierarchy of the Talking Book Network is an Associate and will now pull us out of the religious ghetto and classify us with *New Republic, National Review*, etc."

Well! Comes now a note from one Gene Vader, Jr., of Minnetonka, Minnesota, who reports: "It has been done. This Associate has been a volunteer broadcaster with Radio Talking Book for some time; I do a weekly 5 P.M. program on Thursdays called, fittingly, 'Thursday Commentary.' The volunteer who does 'Religious Update' has graciously yielded *Commonweal* to my program. *Commonweal* now shares time with *New Republic, American Spectator, Reason*, and the *Washington Post National Weekly*. I hope you like the new time and the varied company."

Yes, we do. We also like Gene Vader. And we are AMAZED.

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TWO DEPARTURES, ONE ARRIVAL At a meeting held in the *Commonweal* offices on November 4, the board of directors of the Commonweal Foundation regretfully accepted the resignation of Paul V. Farrell from the board. The directors also expressed deep appreciation for all that Paul Farrell has done to advance the cause of *Commonweal*, both as a board member (he served since the creation of the foundation in 1984) and as friend and adviser since 1947. In the latter capacities he was joined by his wife, Theodora (Teddy), whose first husband, John Cogley (d. 1976), was a *Commonweal* editor for a number of years. Himself a veteran journalist (the longtime editor of *Purchasing* magazine), Mr. Farrell made special efforts to call the attention of the nation's major media to materials published in *Commonweal*. He resigned for reasons of health.

Also in November, the Foundation board elected Dennis O'Brien as a director and as vice-president for the *Commonweal* endowment. Mr. O'Brien is president of the University of Rochester, author of *God and the New Haven Railway*, and a frequent contributor to the magazine, most recently in the issue of October 22 ["Between Law and Character"].

Other directors of the Foundation: President, Edward S. Skillin; vice-president, James O'Gara; secretary-treasurer, Margaret O'Brien Steinfels; Sidney Callahan, Daniel Murtaugh, and Richard Sexton.

With this issue, Gerald Weales completes a twenty-five-year association with *Commonweal* as our theater reviewer. Gerald Weales has always been concise, perceptive, fair-minded, remarkably conversant with the lore of contemporary theater, and of course indefatigable. The editors are grateful for his long service to our readers.

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REPORT FROM CHICAGO

CARDINAL JOSEPH BERNARDIN

A SHEPHERD ENFOLDED BY HIS FLOCK

An early Bob Newhart routine has a game company man listening over the phone to Abner Doubleday's cockamamie idea. "Nine men on a side, Ab? (chuckle) Why nine? (chuckle) Why not, say eight, or ten? And the ball landing on one side of the line is fair? On the other side is foul?" The gamesman barely contains himself. Ab has a good idea now and then, but this baseball business is a laugher.

Somewhere between Bob Newhart and Kafka falls the reliability of suppressed-memory evidence of sex abuse as invoked by the accuser of Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago. The accuser says that under therapy he has remembered being sodomized by Bernardin sixteen or more years ago and has brought suit, asking $10 million for the pain and anguish caused.

"Spectral evidence," mutters a Chicago-area cleric over breakfast coffee, his *Tribune* open before him. He has in mind the testimony that put alleged witches behind bars and worse in seventeenth-century New England. Now the crucible engulfs the leader of the American church's progressive, you might say American, wing.

On the other hand, comments a young recent graduate of an Eastern college where rage simmers constantly about abuse of women by men, it's the sort of evidence a rape victim recalls only after plumbing the depths of her psyche.

In Chicago, let me tell you, the latter response is barely evident. You might say it's suppressed, held in reserve for when some other, more concrete revelations are made, of a less spectral nature.

In other words, Chicago is 99 percent behind Bernardin, and you know about the 1 percent only spectrally.

Bernardin might be panned here for mismanagement, as for the number of schools and parishes closed on his watch, but he's no candidate for obloquy. He has people mad at him for not being tough enough or shrewd enough or ready enough to take charge of his (a) rebellious or (b) mean-spirited operation. Why doesn't he (a) crack down on altar girls and rail against libertinism or (b) clean out his Augean chancery stables of time-servers and me-firsters?

A priest may privately call him a "pantywaist," using a quaint, playground-style term for a weak-knee. But almost to a man, priests like Bernardin. The best-known of them, Andrew Greeley, a typically fractious Chicago-breed priest (and the type goes a long way back), is in his corner. Having defended the guilty, the archdiocese now must defend the innocent, he said.

Hundreds gave Bernardin standing ovations at a seminary-campus meeting on his return from the Washington bishops' meeting and at the inaugural sesquicentennial-year Mass at Holy Name Cathedral. His predecessor, Cardinal John P. Cody,

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received all sorts of orchestrated support when he was pilloried by the *Sun-Times* for alleged financial and noncelibate misbehavior. At least some of it was heartfelt, but standing ovations were saved for his resignation announcement, which never came.

Bernardin not only received standing ovations from supporters but he demonstrated observable grace under pressure, delivering a bravura news conference performance in which he handled a dozen (it seemed like a dozen) "How do you feel?" questions along the lines of "Otherwise, how did you like the play, Mrs. Lincoln?" How did those bozos think he felt? Just curious, they were.

Bernardin never quite rejoined, but he did fix a blue-eyed gaze or two and allowed himself slight shows of impatience. But not even the frenziedly feeding media have been what you call hard on him. Interview stories have featured churchgoers whose presumably unscripted remarks could not have been scripted better. "We feel for the cardinal, and at the same time we have to respect the pain of victims whoever they are," etc.

Bernardin had already said it, as the *Tribune*'s religion writer, Michael Hirsley, emphasized in a column. His defense must be carried on "in such a way that it will not frighten or scare off true victims," said Bernardin.

By saying it, he "did a critical service to victims of clergy abuse at precisely a time when it might not have been expected of him. He refused to let their legitimate cause be swept away," said Hirsley.

Or as Barbara Blaine, of Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests (SNAP), said, also quoted by Hirsley, "He has set a perfect example of how to respond to allegations. He has aggressively defended himself without attacking victims."

He even offered to go and see and "comfort" the accuser, a thirty-four-year-old AIDS victim. One recalls Pope John Paul II bending in prayer in the prison cell with Mehmet Ali Agca, his attempted assassin. "I'm a pastor," said Bernardin.

JIM BOWMAN

Jim Bowman, former religion editor of the Chicago Daily News, *is a free-lance writer in Chicago.*

OF SEVERAL MINDS David R. Carlin, Jr.

MY QUEST FOR WISDOM

EIGHT APHORISMS IN SEARCH OF A HAT

I am still a number of years away from being an old man, but as I advance in age I give more and more thought to how I can be a wise and dignified old man when the time comes.

The other day I took the first step toward dignification by purchasing a tweedy "old man's hat." I don't know the official name of this kind of hat (or cap), and I realize that even young men are permitted to wear it. But I've always thought of it as an old man's hat because it was the kind of hat worn by my grandfather, whom I knew only when he was an old man. When I graduated from college in 1960, eleven years after his death, I spent the summer at the University of Edinburgh; and one day I made a sentimental side trip to Paisley, my grandfather's home town, which he last saw about 1910 when he departed for America. As I got off the bus in the center of Paisley, what did I see but a multitude of old men, all of them resembling my grandfather because they were all wearing the "old man's cap." And of course they were all looking very dignified.

So when I appeared in public the other day wearing the old man's hat, it was an epoch in my life. I had become my grandfather.

But dignity isn't everything. Wisdom too is needed. The correct old man will be in possession not only of a proper hat but also of a repertoire of aphorisms that sum up the wisdom he has accumulated in the course of a long and well-spent lifetime. Unfortunately I have but scant recollection of any words of wisdom uttered by my grandfather; otherwise I could simply plagiarize his words as I plagiarized his hat. He was a bricklayer, so he told me something about how to lay bricks properly; but alas, I can't remember what. He also told me that an English shilling was worth twenty-five cents in American money; but shillings no longer exist, and even if they did they would be worth only about a dime, the sun having in the meantime set on the British Empire.

"However, he did leave some pearls of wisdom."

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So it looks as if I have no choice but to discover my own wisdom. I've been working at this, asking myself: "What important insights have I gained that can be expressed in twenty-five words or less?"

The only one I've come up with so far is this: "In the course of my adult lifetime, the machinery has got better and the men have got worse." Or to express this in inclusive (though unfortunately nonalternative) language: "There has been a twofold process of technological improvement and human deterioration."

Witness on the other hand: fine automobiles, "smart" bombs, pollution controls, genetic engineering, life-saving surgery and drugs, and, of course, computers, the great symbol of the era.

But witness on the other hand: high rates of crime, violence, divorce, out-of-wedlock births, and sexually transmitted diseases, plus declining SAT scores and voter-participation rates.

So obvious has the superiority of technique to humans become that when humans fail nowadays we increasingly abandon attempts to rehabilitate them. In the old days (that is, from the fall of Adam and Eve to the fall of Sigmund Freud, which took place about 1968), we used to try to improve imperfect people. But now we judge it best to allow them to wallow in their imperfection; meanwhile we try to invent some new piece of machinery that will permit inferior human material to function more or less successfully while remaining inferior.

For example:

1. AIDS. We don't deal with the problem of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases by encouraging sexual restraint (or to call it by its old-fashioned name, chastity). No, we search for a vaccine, in the meantime promoting condom use. But what are condoms and vaccines but machinery?

2. Out-of-wedlock pregnancies. Again, forget about sexual restraint. More machinery is the answer, in this case contraception and abortion for teens.

3. Violent crime. Do we focus on the nearly complete collapse of the two-parent family which has taken place in many lower-class urban neighborhoods, a collapse that breeds crime and violence as surely as swamps breed mosquitoes? Heavens, no! That would give offense to Murphy Brown and her Hollywood friends. Instead, we build more prisons and give longer sentences; that is, more machinery.

4. Education. Are American schoolkids unable to read Shakespeare? Unable to tell you what happened in 1066? Unable to remember who Martin Luther was? Why, then, it's perfectly clear: their schools need more machinery, that is, more computers. After all, by computers ye shall be saved.

5. National deficit. Do Congress and the president exhibit a chronic incapacity for balancing the federal budget? Then let's create an interesting piece of machinery called the Balanced Budget Amendment. (An earlier machine, called Gramm-Rudman-Hollings, broke down after being on the road for only a few miles.)

6. Politicians. Have we grown dissatisfied with elected officials? An item of machinery called Term Limitations will take care of that.

7. Children. Have your children been a disappointment to you? Did they fail to make all-state? Were they turned down at Princeton? Too bad. If you could have waited a few decades, the clone-meisters would have supplied you with kids guaranteed to be smart, athletic, good-looking, cooperative, and unfailingly affable (this last the greatest miracle of all).

8. Et cetera. And if you have any other problems that were not covered above, just call in kindly Dr. Jack Kevorkian and his death machine.

I'll be told that this aphoristic wisdom of mine is an exaggeration. Of course it is. But my fear is that it is not all that much of an exaggeration. We live in a technological culture, as the Europeans of the Middle Ages lived in a religious culture. We have faith in technique, as they had faith in prayer. When they ran into difficulties, they were sure there was a way they could pray themselves out of them, if only they prayed long enough and hard enough and in the right spirit. When we run into difficulties we are confident that we can "technologize" our way out of them, as in the proverb: "If we can put a man on the moon, then surely we can solve problems X, Y, and Z."

It was not so long ago that religious thinkers used to fear that humanism's immoderate glorification of man would lead to a loss of belief in man. Today the thing to fear is not atheism but *a*humanism. Before we even completed the work of abandoning theism for humanism, we have begun to abandon humanism for technicism.

Now let me see, where did I leave my hat? If only we could invent a machine to remedy absent-mindedness! □

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WHAT THE LOSERS WON

THE McCARTHY CAMPAIGN OF '68

"Yet, who would not have at least one time in a life when the leader was the lost leader and the followers the lost followers, and all things being impossible were possible?" Roger Rosenblatt, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the McCarthy presidential campaign—a campaign, he said, of "special fire" with a "reckless purity" not seen since ("MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour," October 6, 1993).

On September 10 of this year there was a symposium at Georgetown University celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of that campaign—the McCarthy presidential campaign of 1968. It was apparent to the participants that the historical facts of that campaign and its precedent-making character have been largely lost in the murk and myth of the docudramas and the journalistic and personal accounts of that eventful year. It was, after all, the year of the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy, of the violence at the Democratic convention in Chicago and the election of Richard Nixon.

But it was also the year of what George Grayson, John Marshall Professor of Government and Citizenship at William and Mary, has called "a political earthquake" that activated young people, women, and other previously ignored groups by giving them a vehicle for changing policy. "They toppled a sitting chief executive, cracked the foundation of the imperial presidency, and sensitized leaders from Lyndon Johnson to Ronald Reagan to the enormous cost of resorting to military solutions to problems rooted in social, economic, and cultural factors."

The committee members who organized the symposium elaborated on this theme. They were historians, political scientists, legislators, and others who had participated in 1968, and they called the campaign "a unique experience" shared by students and adults that had a profound effect on all who took part in it. It was the intent of the committee to illustrate this effect by recognizing especially the many McCarthy campaign workers who have continued their involvement in governmental and nongovernmental public service. Many of the campaigners, said the announcement, quoting a *Washington Post* piece by Curtis Gans (December 20, 1987) have remained "liberal in values, disciplined in tactics, persuasive in approach," and productive of "substantive changes."

The symposium recognized former campaigners who are in office today from city governments to the White House, from state legislatures to the U.S. House and Senate. Hillary Rodham Clinton, for example, campaigned as a Wellesley college student in New Hampshire; Vice-President Al Gore led students in Tennessee. It recognized as equally important the campaigners who have led nongovernmental groups and organizations of significant service to society and have provided an important number of dedicated teachers in our colleges, universities, and law schools.

Serious and as issue-oriented as they have ever been, the reunited campaigners, who had come from states as various and far away as California and New York, Oregon, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Iowa, and Florida, listened with concentration to, and held discussions with the speakers on three panels. The keynote panel on "Participatory and Movement Politics" was composed of Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist Haynes Johnson, assistant to the president and director of the Office of National Service, Eli Segal, Congressman Don Edwards, and historian Joan Challinor.

As they spoke, each seemed to recapture the feelings of a quarter century ago and the atmosphere of the time became almost palpable to everyone in the room—a nation desperately divided, a peace movement whose fringe groups were becoming ever more violent in demonstrations, young men going to prison or leaving the country in protest of the draft, other young men mired thousands of miles from home in a hopeless war. "Do we remember," said one of the speakers, "what it took to issue a political challenge to a president in wartime, and how important it was to take the protest from the streets into the political process?"

Other speakers that afternoon spoke of the belief they had carried from 1968 that government could be an agency of change, and of their efforts to see that it was. They included Yale law professor Harlon Dalton, who had been a member of the National Commission on AIDS, Jessica Tuchman Mathews, deputy undersecretary for global affairs in the Department of State, and John Podesta, staff secretary to President Bill Clinton. They were not wholly hopeful but they had kept trying.

The same was true of those who represented '68ers involved in service to society, the third panel: Martin Peretz, editor and publisher of the *New Republic*, Curtis Gans, director of the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate, and Taylor Branch, chronicler of the civil rights movement and also a Pulitzer Prize-winner. Midge Miller, the last speaker on that panel, now director of the Madison Institute and a long-time state legislator, may have spoken for all of them when she said, "I was an activist before that campaign but I am glad that my time in public office came after it. I served then with an entirely different perspective."

Perhaps that difference had its roots in Roger Rosenblatt's words about the effect of a lost cause, "What a lost cause does for the individual's soul is to free it from everything but principle. One does something because one believes it is right, there is no other reason for doing it." A cause cannot truly be "lost," it seems to me, however, if it had that effect on so many people. □

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WHY AREN'T WE IN VIETNAM?

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT

JAMES F. O'BRIEN

The Honorable William Clinton
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The statement released by the White House in September regarding your latest action in connection with the embargo on Vietnam said, "In evaluating how best to achieve the fullest possible accounting, the president looks forward to the continued counsel and advice from the families whose loved ones are missing and the veterans whose fellow soldiers did not come home." Given that invitation, I set aside years of cynicism first forged by my own experience in Vietnam during the war and shall attempt, as a veteran whose fellow soldiers did not come home, to offer you the counsel that you seek.

Heeding the call to idealism that President John F. Kennedy issued to our generation, at the age of twenty-one I enlisted in the United States Army and went to Vietnam in August 1969, as an infantry platoon leader with the 173rd Airborne Brigade. While in Vietnam, I struggled with and resolved the moral issues of that war based upon the facts then known to me and concluded that the United States was attempting to do the right thing for the Vietnamese people and for global stability. Many of us who served in combat in Vietnam entertained the notion that, if we survived our tours of duty, we would have much to offer America as a result of our experience. We were soon disabused of that illusion. In the face of the unreceptive and sometimes hostile environment of the political Left, which considered us killers, and the political Right, which blamed us for losing the war, we chose simply to blend quietly into the fabric of America, complete our education, raise families, and share in the American dream. However, unlike most of the American population, we cannot pretend that the whole thing just never happened.

For many of us, watching the fall of Saigon on television was heartrending. We knew full well what was to come for our allies, the soldiers, the civil servants, the teachers, and the people at large who, at our insistence, had thrown in their lot with the United States. The shooting war was over, but the worst suffering was yet to come. After the fall of Saigon, our allies in the South were imprisoned and tortured, and the remains of some of our own soldiers were abandoned in Southeast Asia. Our government and our population chose to turn their backs on a situation that was a constant reminder of the failure of American power.

The United States then proceeded to embargo all of Vietnam. Perhaps the philosophy of an embargo is that it will so isolate an "enemy" nation that its government will cooperate with the embargoing party or that that government will fall from within as a result of social upheaval. What is overlooked is that the impact of the embargo is felt primarily by the common people, those least equipped to bear that burden and totally without power to effect the ends the embargo is supposed to achieve. In the case of Vietnam, what was also overlooked was that the Viet-

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namese people endure and make do, no matter what. They proved that throughout their war with the French and then their war with us. Despite overwhelming superiority in fire power and technology, we were unable to obtain our objectives in Vietnam. The same determination has allowed Vietnam to endure during the years of the U.S. embargo.

I make these observations based upon first-hand knowledge.

In January 1991, at the invitation of Holt International Children's Services of Eugene, Oregon, a *pro bono* client of my law firm, I returned to Vietnam for the first time since 1970. I traveled there, with a great deal of trepidation, to visit Holt's orphanages and programs in Vietnam and the hospital facilities that provided medical care for the children of these programs. I went first to Saigon, then traveled all along Highway 1, north to Danang and on to Hanoi. What I saw shocked me. There was no more shooting, but the devastation in human terms was every bit as real as during the war. Throughout the country, I saw orphaned children, crippled children, blind children, children suffering from malnutrition and totally inadequate medical facilities. I met doctors—many of whom had served in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam and spent years in re-education camps—trying desperately to provide fundamental care to their people, yet isolated by our embargo from the world community, education, technology, and medical supplies.

To my surprise, everywhere I went, when I was identified as an American veteran, I was warmly received, not just by governmental officials engaged in diplomacy, but by the people waiting and hoping for the Americans to return to help them build a life for themselves in their country.

On that trip, I visited the area where I had fought during the war. It was dusk as I climbed a hill in Binh Dinh Province to survey a landing zone that had served as a base area for my battalion. When I got to the top of that hill, I saw a monument, built by the Vietnamese to celebrate *their* victory. It was a large, triumphant memorial that depicted the VC coming out of the hills, rescuing the women and children and killing us. It was quite graphic, quite disturbing.

As I stood on that hilltop, I reflected on my fourteen friends who did not come home from Vietnam—for me, their souls still dwell in those mountains—and I wondered again what they and so many others had died for. I then thought of what I had seen in the orphanages, hospitals, and streets of Vietnam. I thought of the homeless, disabled, sick kids, of the wretched hospitals, of the malnutrition and suffering. I concluded that, whatever my friends had died for, whatever so many of us had fought and were wounded for, it was not for this.

I realized that the war was not over. It is still being waged by us, but this time it is an economic war. The victims are not our enemy but the very people Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon had sent us there to save. Worse, the victims of this economic war were not even born during the time of the conflict. They are paying the price for our defeat in Vietnam.

I have returned two more times to Vietnam; in February 1992, and July/August 1993. I have been working with Holt International Children's Services and other U.S. Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) who are trying to provide aid to the children and hospitals of Vietnam. I have been able to help establish a national burn project in Vietnam for the treatment of severely burned and handicapped children. The work of the NGOs in Vietnam under the humanitarian exception to the embargo is laudable, but it is a mere drop in the bucket. There are now 71 million people in Vietnam, half of them born after the war. The Communist party, although maintaining control, is a small minority of the population. Further, as a result of the inadequacies of socialism (and not because of the U.S. embargo), the Vietnamese government has been forced to turn to the free enterprise system and to loosen its once oppressive hold on the freedoms of the Vietnamese people.

Not one Vietnamese that I have encountered, whether in the United States or in Vietnam, whether from the North or the South, has ever suggested that the U.S. embargo was having a salutary effect, politically or otherwise, in Vietnam. All of them see the lifting of the U.S. embargo as a panacea for their social and economic ills.

As a result of the modification of the embargo constraints by the Bush administration in December 1992, and the end of opposition by your administration in July to the Franco-Japanese loan to Vietnam in connection with its delinquent IMF loans, foreign governments and entrepreneurs are investing heavily in Vietnam. Today, only the U.S. is isolating itself from Southeast Asia. As desirable as most Vietnamese believe it would be to have a U.S. presence in Vietnam as a balance to the Chinese, Japanese, and others who seek to dominate their economy, soon the United States will be irrelevant to the future development of Vietnam. The Vietnamese will turn, reluctantly, to economic partnerships with our competitors, and we shall have again lost the opportunity to be a constructive presence in Southeast Asia.

The changes I have seen on the ground in Vietnam in the years I have been returning there since the war have been dramatic. The terms communism and socialism have become meaningless. Throughout the country, people are attempting to become involved in a free enterprise system to better the quality of their lives. The economic growth of Vietnam in the last several years has been astounding and all without foreign aid. The Communists have permitted this to happen, not out of a burst of enlightened enthusiasm for democracy, but rather in an attempt to survive and maintain their dominance.

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Mr. President, there is no logical, economic, geopolitical, or moral basis for continuing the embargo. Indeed if it ever had any value under any analysis, it is worthless now and the only victims of it are the people of Vietnam (as opposed to the government of Vietnam) and the people of the United States.

While we isolate ourselves from Vietnam, Japan, France, Australia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, and others have already replaced the former Soviet bloc nations as Vietnam's trading partners. As a result of the July 2 announcement that the United States would not block the bridge loan from France and Japan, private investment capital from our trade competitors has already started flowing into Vietnam. This clearly means a loss of U.S. business opportunities and U.S. jobs.

Until the formation of the Joint Task Force for Full Accounting in 1992, eighteen years of isolation imposed by the embargo yielded little cooperation from Vietnam in accounting for our MIA's. The best way to obtain as full an accounting as possible of our MIA's is to change our strategy and to engage the Vietnamese. Instead of continuing to isolate ourselves from them, we should engage them in a true *quid pro quo*. Such cooperation as has been given by Vietnam on the MIA issue has not been reciprocated by the U.S., except with regard to the IMF. More importantly, the continuation of the embargo endangers the mission of the Joint Task Force, reducing the credibility of those in the Vietnamese government who have encouraged cooperation with the United States.

It has been said in editorial pages and elsewhere that, because of your personal history regarding the Vietnam War, politically, you cannot simply lift the embargo, even though it is damaging U.S. interests. You and I made different decisions as how best to respond to the leadership President Kennedy offered our generation and we both live with the consequences of those decisions. However, it is ironic that, as a young man, you were so opposed to the war and now that you are in a position to bring finality to that war, domestic political considerations inhibit you from doing so. As a Senator, Kennedy authored *Profiles in Courage*, chronicling great Americans who took the course of their conscience, despite the political risks. Mr. President, you are now faced with a similar choice.

Make no mistake about it, I am not an apologist for the Vietnamese government. They were my enemy and their soldiers did their best to make sure that I did not return from Vietnam. Rather, I am an American, advocating fidelity to those principles that America believes it stands for and for which so many Americans fought and died. I simply, but strongly, believe that our policy toward Vietnam is wrong and not in the best interests of the United States, the Vietnamese people, and the families of the MIA's. I urge you to lift the embargo and to provide the leadership to at long last end the Vietnam War.

Very truly yours,
James F. O'Brien

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HOW LONG MUST WE PRESERVE LIFE?

CATHOLIC ETHICS AT THE END OF LIFE

THOMAS A. SHANNON

A year ago my wife and I spent an evening with a group of couples who had been meeting for serious discussion over a period of twenty years. We were invited to discuss ethical issues surrounding the removal of life-prolonging therapies. I was to give an overview and then discussion would follow—as indeed it did. The other salient fact about this group is that it was Jewish; my wife and I are Catholic. As the discussion proceeded and a variety of points were pursued and different perspectives vigorously argued and counterargued, one man asked me what role my religion played in developing my perspective. Starting to give the standard statement on the ordinary-extraordinary distinction made within Catholic moral thinking, my questioner interrupted. "No, no," he said, "you believe in immortality, otherwise you could not speak as you do."

My questioner was pointing to an important theological context for discussions of forgoing or terminating life-support therapies—a context that gives a particular orientation to this discussion, indeed, gives it meaning and life, as well as a certain consoling perspective. This theological context has two dimensions: belief in God and immortality, and the finiteness of human life.

As Christians we may too easily assume belief in God as a given in ethical discussions, but without taking seriously what that actually means. God is our ultimate reality. Such ultimateness is the ground of the command that we are not to have false gods before us. Nothing and no one but God is to be adored or worshiped as God. Nothing else, no matter how prized and precious, is of ultimate value. The ethical conclusion is that all values and practices must be seen as means to our journey to God, not ends. To say or suggest that anything else has the ultimate value or meaning that God has is to commit idolatry.

This includes human life. For while human life is sacred and valuable, it is created and finite and to suggest it has an ultimacy because of its sacredness is to commit idolatry. Such a point has ethical significance in evaluating medical therapies and technologies. For while life is valuable, it is neither the ultimate value nor the only value relevant to the issue at hand. Nor does life's being a basic value give it a privileged position among other values. Even though life is not a means to other ends, it is not of ultimate value. Thus, for example, some argue that the demands of justice can require the taking of human life as in war or self-defense. Were human life of ultimate value, moral positions asserting the priority of other values would not be viable within Roman Catholicism.

This perspective is particularly relevant when the only outcome of a therapeutic or technical intervention is the preservation of organic or biological life. Designating biological survival as the normative or controlling value in decision making in these cases comes close to idolatry because life is given an importance beyond its created status. Life is made an ultimate good rather than remaining a finite good.

As Christians we also believe in the life of the world to come. We have all taken comfort from the belief, expressed in the funeral liturgy, that life is not taken away, but transformed. Our belief and our hope is for life in the Kingdom, revealed in its fullness in the Resurrection of Jesus.

This belief too provides strenuous challenge to those who would confer ultimate value on our present life. For indeed if we are dust and unto dust we will return, why does bio-

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logical life have such a controlling role in ethical decision making? The question grows out of my reading and reflection on "Nutrition and Hydration: Moral Considerations" (*Origins*, January 30, 1992), by the Pennsylvania Bishops' Conference, and "Nutrition and Hydration: Moral and Pastoral Reflections" by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Pro-Life Committee (*Origins*, April 9, 1992). The Pennsylvania bishops, for example, say: "Supplying nourishment would not be an instance of simply prolonging the dying process without actually preserving life. Life would be preserved at length and not merely temporarily prolonged while waiting for an imminently terminal condition to complete its course."

For the patient in the persistent vegetative state, biological life certainly would be prolonged at length, but what confers on a created reality the ultimate significance that would lead these bishops to their conclusion? What in human dignity is protected by maintaining the biological processes when there is no reasonable basis for expecting any change in the person's medical status? To maintain biological processes for their own sake gives priority to the impersonal rather than the personal, is death-denying rather than death-accepting.

These two core beliefs of Christianity—the ultimacy of God and the finiteness of human existence—seem to me to be given too little consideration in current episcopal teaching about forgoing or terminating therapies or technologies. Can one not argue that life is sacred without conferring an ultimacy on it that borders on the idolatrous? I am seriously concerned about the strong tendency in ecclesial discussions of these questions to absolutize biological life or, at least, to make it the privileged factor in decision making.

In the context of this theological background, I want to examine several other critical issues, particularly in relation to medically assisted nutrition and hydration.

First is cost. Here the Pennsylvania bishops make an interesting observation. They acknowledge what the church has long held: when a family reaches the limits of its resources, they have reached the limits of ordinary care. But then they go on to say "however, in the society in which we live this does not present a fully convincing argument. Resources are available from other sources, and these can often be tapped before a family reaches dire financial straits." Assuming that such resources are available, why does the fact of their availability make them ethically mandatory? Why does the use of scarce funds and resources for prolonging biological life take priority over other uses?

The NCCB's Pro-Life Committee also acknowledges that cost can be a valid factor in decisions about life support. But this issue is needlessly complicated when the committee separates the cost of providing a particular modality—for example, medically assisted nutrition and hydration—from the cost of the total care. First, the actual cost of a therapy or treatment does not in itself constitute the basis of the determination of ordinary or extraordinary. Rather it is cost in relation to the patient's values and overall prognosis. Second, if one breaks the total cost down, it may be the case—to follow the bishops' reasoning—that no one particular item considered in itself would be that expensive (though not if one has looked at itemized hospital invoices lately). However, few, if indeed any, pay for isolated items only. The totality of the cost of treatment is the point of departure for a determination of proportion or disproportion. To argue for the determination of proportion or disproportion on the basis of one or the other therapy or intervention distorts the evaluation of the actual cost of the totality of the treatment, the appropriate locus of the moral analysis.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's "Declaration on Euthanasia" (1980), which these two statements cite approvingly, holds that disproportionate means can be refused because of a desire "not to impose excessive expense on the family *or the community*" (my emphasis). The congregation acknowledges that built into the evaluation of whether a treatment or technology is extraordinary or disproportionate is a recognition of both the individual good and the common good. While it may be the case that funds are available outside of the family, either through insurance plans or other state or federal monies, it does not follow that the availability of such funding automatically makes its use ordinary. Neither should we automatically assume an entitlement to them such that denial of access *ipso facto* is an injustice.

A second issue is the traditional distinction between ordi-

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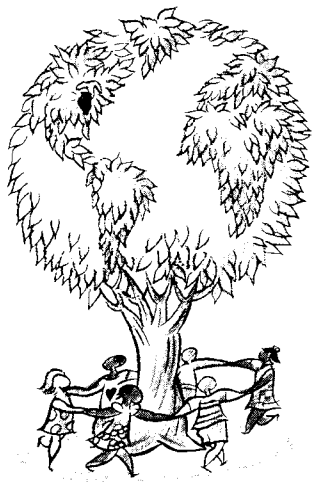

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nary and extraordinary means of treatment. As the Pennsylvania bishops correctly note, such a distinction is not to be "based solely on the commonness and availability of the means themselves, although this is taken into account." This position seems to be in contention with the prolife committee's approving citation of the 1975 Declaration of Helsinki that medical procedures are appropriate if in the judgment of the physician they offer "hope of life, reestablishing health, or alleviating suffering." The Helsinki statement implies that therapies or outcomes are ordinary by virtue of the physician's determination. Such a position is a type of medical indications policy that mandates treatment based on physician assessment of medical benefit or outcome, not the patient's values or the implications of the prognosis for the patient.

Such a position first establishes what is ordinary by categorizing the technology or procedure in the abstract. Second, it does not seek to determine the relation of benefit to burden for the patient. Third, the stance assumes that the physician is the major—or perhaps only—decision maker.

A treatment's routine or customary use in the practice of medicine or even its being lifesaving does not make such a treatment morally ordinary. One must look to the benefits and burdens to see if there is a disproportion. The terms ordinary and extraordinary do not refer to abstract classifications or categorizations of treatments or technologies on the basis of which we determine whether or not they are to be used. Rather these terms refer to the conclusion of a moral analysis of the facts of the case and the relevant values. On the basis of such an analysis we conclude that a particular treatment is ordinary or extraordinary and should be used or not accordingly. This avoids an equivocation between what is medically ordinary—meaning routine—and what is morally ordinary—meaning a favorable proportion of benefits to burdens.

Interesting examples of this meaning of the terms show up in the history of moral theology and exemplify how attuned these moralists were to the culture, the state of medicine, the economic status of the person, and personal values. These examples range from Lessius's teaching in the 1600s ("women, especially virgins, are not bound to accept from men medical treatment of this type in the more secret parts...but many modest virgins prefer to tolerate a disease or death rather than to be touched by men") to Patuzzi's (d. 1769) observation that discussions of ordinary means may be impractical because "people usually sin by being too solicitous of their lives rather than the other way around" (quoted in Daniel Cronin, doctoral dissertation, in *Conserving Human Life*, John XXIII Medical-Moral Research Center, 1991). These are only examples and they have the limits of examples. Nonetheless, they point to a certain common-sense approach to the problem. Their additional significance is the acceptance of the patient's values and perspectives.

A third issue is a pragmatic one. I can think of no surer way to encourage or even play right into the hands of those who are advocating euthanasia than to strongly imply that some therapies cannot be forgone or stopped once started. Please note that I am not saying this is what the bishops actually say. I am talking about what impression people can take from stories about the documents. Such an impression will be a total disaster. One of the sanest and most profoundly Christian instincts of the Catholic medical ethics tradition has been its recognition of the limits of medical intervention, grounded in a clear sense of human finitude. Such wisdom is in danger of being lost.

My reason for fearing such a loss is the growing influence of the extreme versions of the prolife movement which see euthanasia as the analogue of abortion. My impression is that in this quarter, any action that can be remotely construed as a compromise of life is to be rejected. Thus for the sake of the value of biological life, we are to maintain individuals on life support systems until they die. The ultimate or normative value is life, whether personal or biological. Nothing can compro-

George Held

How Sweet the Bye and Bye

(For JBH)

Once the pain preyed unrelenting
you could taste how bad
you wanted to go into that good night
you raged against the light
prayed for it to go out
for you no false heroics
just the stoic's sort.

You could not taste at last
the bile rising to your palate
burned your taste buds out
as your huge tumor crushed gall
bladder and kidney and thrust down
your uterus till you could feel it fall
between your lips like a naturally aborted fetus.

"There's a land that is fairer than day"
you sang me softly in the breath left you
"That's where I want to be
where I won't ever have to do
another goddam thing I don't want to...
I'll be free in the sweet bye and bye."

Then you saw, being blind, the last dim light
your opalescent pupil could permit
and cunningly left behind your agony.

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mise or qualify that value.

A byproduct of this line of argument could be a decision not to start someone on a therapy or technology for fear that it would not be stopped if and when that treatment should become inappropriate. Fear of technological entrapment could cause great harm because people who might benefit from a treatment would not receive it or would reject it. Unfortunately one often does not know whether or not a treatment is beneficial until one actually tries it.

Fourth, the prolife committee uses the terms "treatment" and "care" in a way which suggests that they are interchangeable. Thus the committee asks whether "medically assisted nutrition and hydration should always be seen as a form of normal care." I am quite leery of speaking of treatment and care as interchangeable; for though we are always obligated to care for a patient, we are not always obligated to provide treatment. Neither is a particular treatment always an appropriate way of manifesting care, that is, when the burdens are disproportionate to the benefits. My concern is not to pick linguistic nits, but to warn against an implicit begging of a critical question. For if we assume that treatment and care are mutually extensive terms, then to reject treatment is to reject care, which does not follow.

Fifth and finally, the prolife committee states: "It is not easy to arrive at a single answer to some of the real and personal dilemmas involved in this issue." Why is it necessary for us to arrive at a single answer, particularly when the issue is so complex, as the committee's statement itself documents? I think that the only way a single answer could be given would be to prohibit removal of various forms of life support, particularly medically assisted nutrition and hydration—which of course is the presumption the committee holds. Such a position, however, assumes individuals are not to be trusted in coming to such a serious decision, that answers to complex issues can be formulated in terms universally applicable to all cases, and that the magisterium is to have the final word in resolving practical moral decisions.

Many years ago when I began doing ethics rounds in various hospitals, I was asked to speak with two elderly, unmarried Irish sisters who wanted to terminate treatment for the third sister. We discussed the situation and it was clear that death was imminent and further therapies useless. Indeed, this was the classic case for terminating therapy. Toward the end of our conversation, I asked if they wanted to discuss this with their parish priest, for I was surprised that they asked to speak with the ethicist rather than him. "No," they said, "he will tell us we can't stop the treatments, but we know it's the right thing to do and we're going to do it."

I was taken aback, both because the two sisters were so firm in their assessment and because I would not think that this would be the priest's response. But the fact that this experience from so many years ago was among the first things that came to my mind on reading these documents on medically assisted nutrition and hydration suggests that maybe these elderly sisters were right on both counts. And what a tragedy to feel that the church has abandoned you at the time of deepest need. □

SCREEN

BEHIND THE RED CURTAIN

CHEN'S 'FAREWELL MY CONCUBINE'

Farewell My Concubine is both voluptuous and acrid. Connoisseurs of the exotic will be well enough satisfied with the spectacle in this Chinese movie about the linked destinies of two Beijing Opera stars: the theatrical masks and headdresses; the swirling yellow backdrop curtains against which the shadows of performers glide; theatrical apprentices exercising half-naked in the freezing morning air while singing to the rising sun of the strength that is filling their bodies; the massive political demonstrations that turn city squares into outdoor courtrooms. But Chen Kaige's film is no confection, no *Last Emperor*. It is both a meditation on the ravaging of human potential and an epic hate letter to the theater. *Farewell My Concubine* is fueled by pain.

In fact, early in the film, pain literally floods the screen with color. After a prologue showing the two main characters—Shitou, the portrayer of heroic warriors, and Douzi, the female impersonator specializing in faithful concubines—getting ready to rehearse a farewell performance of their best loved vehicle "Farewell My Concubine" in 1977, we are taken back to their childhood in the 1920s. In black-and-white, we see the turmoil in the streets of Beijing that reflects the inability of the war lords to rule in the face of Western exploitation and Japanese imperialism. A desperate prostitute holding her starving child watches a theater troupe being harassed by a mob. The boy actor, Shitou, wins the crowd over with the old Kung-fu stunt of breaking a board with his head. But instead of thanking his apprentice, the troupe's leader-teacher beats him for a recent delinquency. And, as each blow falls on the lad's backside, the nostalgic black-and-white photography turns into vivid color.

One scene later, the prostitute offers her little son, Douzi, for membership in the company. Although actors are regarded as being only one step above prostitution, at least Douzi will be fed and sheltered. But the troupe's leader refuses: the boy has an extra finger and this minor freakishness disqualifies him. So Mother takes an ax and chops off the offending digit. Douzi's contract is signed with his blood. Then he looks around. Mother has disappeared. Shortly after, Douzi burns the cape she wrapped about him against the cold. A new home accepted, his new identity has begun, and Douzi will have to find other ways to warm himself.

Is that new identity as an impersonator of maidens and concubines a fulfillment or a thwarting of Douzi's soul? There's no easy answer to this. Early in his training, Douzi is inspired through watching a performance of veterans to achieve greatness in his own craft, but why does he keep changing the line, "By nature I am a girl, not a boy" to "I am a boy, not a girl"? Was he destined to be a player, all right, but not exclusively of

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female roles? Or is he simply resentful at having to break from Mother and childhood so suddenly, so violently? In other words, has Douzi found the right path in the wrong way, or is he altogether on the wrong path? In any case, it is as a "female" that he is forced to function both off stage and on.

And Shitou, the macho enactor of warriors...is *he* fulfilling himself? Apparently comfortable with his maleness and married to a former prostitute who adores him, he seems happy. But then why does he constantly feel the need to defy those with the power to hurt him? As a boy he submitted to the blows of his teacher with a willingness bordering on gusto, but as an adult master actor he repeatedly places himself in situations that threaten his life, his livelihood, and his loved ones and colleagues. Perhaps if he had defied his teacher, he wouldn't have achieved a career but also wouldn't have felt compelled to court disaster. And perhaps then he wouldn't feel so resentful whenever Douzi bails him out by giving private performances for the officials and military officers whom Shitou has offended.

These are fascinating ambiguities but we in the audience ponder them more than the characters do. Considering that so much of this movie's drama depends on how the changes and dangers of history force people to squirm within the armors of their personalities, there is surprisingly little *dramatized* introspection. There is no need for it in the childhood scenes which comprise the first quarter. The sequences of training, abuse, childish camaraderie are as emotionally direct, fluent, and naked as anything in *Shoeshine* or *Forbidden Games*. They rouse and sting the viewer. In them, we witness the violent formation and deformation of human nature. Later, as the grown actors face difficulties with successive governments and in their troubled domestic lives, we may justly expect psychological complexity rather than emotional nakedness, but this complexity remains latent, resident in the material but seldom explored through give-and-take between characters. For instance, the drama cries out for a decisive confrontation between Douzi (the abandoned son of a prostitute) and Shitou's wife (an ex-prostitute), but all we get are several minor skirmishes. Chen Kaige is willing to put the bodies and nerves of his characters on the rack but he keeps a respectful distance from their thoughts. Therefore, the latter three quarters of *Concubine* have a static quality that is a relative letdown after the highly charged childhood episodes.

"Because of the shortening attention span of the average audience today, Herr Wagner, we must ask you to limit the length of your next opera to no more than four and a half hours."

Of course, this lack of dynamism may be Chen's very point. Under the opacity of adult good manners, prideful aloofness, stoicism, and hypocrisy, Shitou and Douzi remain children. The director may feel that there is no need for psychological probing of his heroes since we have already learned everything about these two by watching them as children. And, sure enough, under pressure they always revert to childish form. Douzi always sacrifices himself just as the traditional woman is taught to do, and always resents the fact that his devotion invariably goes unappreciated. And Shitou must always bluster his way into danger like a traditional male and must also bluster his resentment whenever bailed out by his "concubine." Something is missing at the core of their natures. Interrogated by the Red Guard, they don't merely collapse but drag each other down in an ecstasy of unleashed rancor. Beaten by the old when they are little, beaten by the young when they are old, these two actors, reputedly so splendid on stage, are programmed for degradation. In *Farewell My Concubine*, we have a static, despairing view of human nature.

I write "reputedly so splendid" because, though there are gripping sequences of theatrical training and breathtaking views of backstage activity, we are allotted only glimpses of the actual performances. Are Leslie Cheung and Zhand Fengyi, so felicitous in their characterizations of Douzi and Shitou, not adept at Beijing Opera style? Or was Chen Kaige, by his very omission, evincing a disgust with an art form that has made his heroes suffer so grievously? If the latter, he made a mistake. Recently, I had another look at *Mephisto* with Klus Maria Brandauer enacting a spectacularly talented and spectacularly amoral actor who collaborates with the Nazis. The film's director, István Szabó, shows us the antihero on stage, doing everything from operetta to Goethe. By witnessing Brandauer's exultation in his artistry, we understand why he cozies up to a regime that gives him a stage to dominate. For want of a comparable look at Shitou and Douzi, we lack the sensual rationale for their acceptance of a life that has done so much to cramp their spirits.

Nevertheless, *Farewell My Concubine* is quite compelling. If the protagonists are finally as static as statues, we can nevertheless circle round a statue and view it from different angles. Chen does this circling for us through subtle parallels, repetitions, contrasts. One example: seeing his future wife besieged by rather violent customers on the second floor of a whorehouse, Shitou, standing on the ground floor, calls to her to throw herself down into his arms. It's a perilous drop but, trusting his acrobatic skill, she jumps. Bracing himself, Shitou saves her. Much later in the movie, Shitou is behaving with self-destructive bravado toward some politically dangerous intruders who

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have swarmed into his theater. Standing on a platform high above the stage, the actor's wife gets his attention with a cry. He looks up, and she tosses him an umbrella which he deftly catches. Not nearly so spectacular a feat as catching a plummeting body, but she has made her point: brace yourself once again and save both of us.

Because of its visual beauty and vital acting, and a story that takes us through the hazards of several tyrannical regimes, *Farewell My Concubine* has the texture of a great historical novel. What it lacks, or rather what it deliberately eschews, is the psychological penetration of such a novel. Let's not look too deeply, Chen Kaige seems to say, some wounds are best left unprobed.

RICHARD ALLEVA

STAGE

STORYTELLING

'TENNESSEE' & 'FRAGMENTS'

As I write this, there is a very good production of *Dancing at Lughnasa* playing at the Philadelphia Drama Guild/Annenberg Center; later in the season, Arden, another Philadelphia company, will be doing *Translations* (1980). Philadelphia is not an anomaly. Brian Friel—new works and old—has become a staple of regional theaters all over the country. Yet his most recent play, *Wonderful Tennessee,* in a predictably excellent Abbey Theatre production, lasted only a few days on Broadway. It will presumably find new productions somewhere beyond the street of broken dreams.

Like *Aristocrats* (1979), *Wonderful Tennessee* is another Friel play in which a group of people gather for an occasion—a death, a celebration—and quietly, unwillingly let their lives unravel before our eyes. In *Tennessee*, three couples have come to a decaying pier in Donegal (not far from the fictional Ballybeg, the usual setting of Friel plays) to catch a boat to an island only occasionally visible offshore. The outing was Terry's idea, to celebrate his birthday, but they are stranded on the pier since the aged boatman, who lives just offstage, never comes to get them. As they pass the time—talking and singing, fueling and damping down the tensions among them—we learn that Terry's sister, who seems so relentlessly dense, is not so much forgetful as blessed by a selective memory that allows her to misremember her part in her dying husband's having turned away from the career in classical music that was his youthful ambition. His voice nearly destroyed by the disease that is killing him, he does most of his talking with his accordion. Terry's sister-in-law, a reluctant teacher of classics, is given to raucous songs to mask her disappointment in her husband, who is writing a book about time that he will never finish, and her uneasiness over an affair with Terry. Terry's own marriage, to a lawyer who is in and out of institutions, is even less stable than the others. The vulgarian among these quasi-intellectuals, Terry, a pop-music promoter and gambler, has been sustaining them financially. Now he is broke—temporarily, he insists—but long enough for him to lose the option he has taken on the island, which he remembers having visited years ago.

The title comes from a song that they all sing, "Down by the Canebrake," in which Tennessee is the unattainable destination of the song's narrative voice. The island—once a place of Christian pilgrimage—is their Tennessee, a promise of peace and beauty, a surcease from loss. Remembered hymns aside, they seem largely secular, but they perform a ritual before heading back to their everyday lives. One of them removes a ruined life preserver from the frame that holds it, which is then revealed as a cross, and to it they attach bits of their belongings—bits of themselves—and after circling a pile of rocks, they leave, promising to return. A band of recognizable Friel losers who cling to the possibility that their Tennessee is still out there on the horizon, still reachable.

While watching *Tennessee*, I was reminded of a very different play that I had just seen at the Ensemble Theatre of Cincinnati. It was Edward Albee's new play, *Fragments*, which will be coming in this production, directed by the playwright, to the Signature Theatre in New York, a venue devoted to the works of Albee. One of the devices of the director and the characters in *Tennessee* is the telling of stories, ostensibly a way of passing the time, actually—through both the story and the interruptions—a way of revealing the characters. By using a similar device within a nonrealistic structure, Albee has created what his subtitle calls "A Concerto Grosso." That musical term, as it is defined within the play itself, consists of a series of solo turns and an occasional duet set within a group performance. The cast of *Fragments* consists of eight actors—four men and four women—who are identified by their real names. They tell stories, some comic (the account of trying to bury a dog frozen solid with his tail straight out), some serious, even sentimental (a loss-of-innocence reminiscence by the actor who wears an ACT-UP tee shirt). The tone of the work deepens from the first to the second act, ending with a ritual laying on of hands—like the end of a group therapy session—as an actor ruminates on his aging and his need to be touched. Given the subtitle of the play, the actors should be instruments only, but this is an Edward Albee work and, without the crutch of linear plot, they develop recognizable personalities. As a group, they seem to have accepted life on Friel's pier, but here, too, wonderful Tennessee hovers just over the horizon.

Shortly after I began to cover plays for *Commonweal* in 1968, I wrote my "last theater review" (January 22, 1971). The magazine had decided to drop the stage column. The column and I were back by the end of the year (December 17), intermittently at first and then regularly. The magazine has decided once again to drop the stage column. After twenty-five years, I suspect that this is my last "last theater review" for *Commonweal.*

GERALD WEALES

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The crisis in biblical scholarship

LUKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON

In a recent review of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (*Commonweal*, May 7, 1993), I commented that its failure to use critical biblical scholarship left me less disturbed than a New Testament scholar ought to have been. I noted that critical scholarship had not managed much real history or authentic theology, and had certainly not helped transmit the faith to the next generation. Perhaps charmed by unaccustomed candor from the guild, or provoked by such unseemly spite, the editors of *Commonweal* rewarded me by assigning three books, requesting that I clarify that cryptic comment in more considered fashion and with live targets.

Contemporary biblical scholarship considered from some angles seems to be in good shape. There are certainly more people with Ph.D. degrees in biblical studies than in any previous era. Regional, national, and international conventions proliferate and prosper. New journals are announced or appear every year. So many dissertations, monographs, books, and articles are being produced that literally no one can even count much less be accountable for the yearly production. Measured quantitatively, the business of biblical scholarship is booming. And from any perspective, the great gains of knowledge and understanding made available by such industry is impressive. The century's armies of researchers have not been lazy. The results of new discoveries and the reexamination of older holdings have made available an unprecedented wealth of knowledge about the biblical world. Inscriptions, coins, artifacts, texts known and newly discovered have been deciphered, edited, translated, and published. Scholars today have unimaginable amounts of information available as close as the computer keyboard. Measured quantitatively, biblical knowledge floods the earth.

Other perspectives, however, suggest that all is not well. As in other boom industries, disquieting amounts of fraud and fakery appear. Overproduction itself depreciates value. More than that, however, there are growing signs that the energy and activity seem increasingly without direction. What is all this learning about, to what is it directed, for whom is it any benefit?

The problem is not simply that too much is written for anyone to read, or that the pressures of academic advancement encourage premature publication with an inevitable decline in quality. These are signals that prompt a more fundamental question: Is any genuine conversation taking place? Does it have any point? Does all this machinery of scholarship simply create "product," or does it contribute to human wisdom concerning history or life before God? Jon Levenson identifies my own growing discomfort precisely in his introduction: "At the heart of [the] crisis lie the loss of a transcendent goal for learning and the weakening of the communities and practices that can sustain the faith and belief upon which all learning—and not only biblical studies—depends." An important factor in evaluating the present condition of biblical studies is its shift in social location away from the church and synagogue to the academy, and increasingly to an academy shaped by opposition rather than allegiance to traditional faith. That shift removes biblical scholarship from any readership for whom questions and answers about the texts have genuine existential significance, and leaves thousands of scholars dancing for no apparent reason around a very small book.

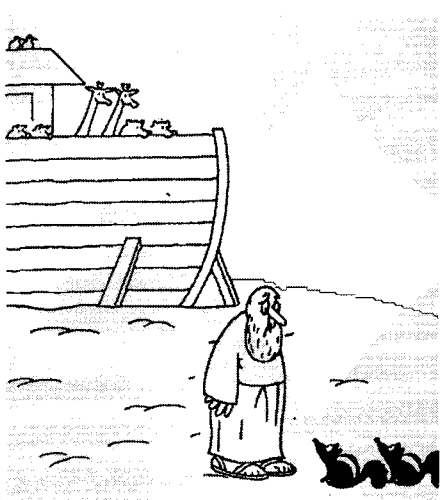
The long struggle of "the historical critical method" for "free inquiry" liberated from the control of dogma and then of organized religion, has been accomplished. Many scholars now teach in secular academies and those who do not have their work largely defined by questions shaped

Books discussed in this essay

The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism, *by Jon D. Levenson, Westminster/John Knox Press, $14.95, 192 pp.*

The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins, *by Burton L. Mack, HarperSanFrancisco, $22, 275 pp.*

Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible, *by Brevard S. Childs, Fortress Press, $40, 745 pp.*



"Do you have any references?"

LUKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON *is professor of New Testament at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University. He is author of* The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation, *and* Faith's Freedom: A Classic Spirituality for Contemporary Christians *(both Fortress).*

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by academic inertia rather than by the life of a religious community.

But as Levenson acutely observes in several of his essays, the liberation has been ambiguous and uncertain. It is true that a variety of new methodological approaches (structuralist, literary, social-scientific) dignify many practitioners with academic seriousness. But some form of "theological" motivation continues to drive a great deal of biblical scholarship even when it is explicitly disavowed. It is a form of theology, however, weirdly separated from the faith or practice of living communities, and frequently comes camouflaged as "history."

The contribution of Levenson's book is its careful analysis of this ambiguity. Writing from a Jewish perspective, he acutely observes consistent features of Christian biblical criticism that help account for the odd fact that so many educated and liberated intellectuals can come to so little consensus. The first is its theological tendentiousness, which frequently appears as an implicit anti-Semitism. What Levenson means is that the construal of history always turns out to vindicate Christian claims in sharp contrast to those of Judaism. The second is the way the category of "history" has become entangled with that of "theology," with disastrous results for both modes of knowing. Levenson's final essay on "Exodus and Liberation" exposes the conceptual confusion underlying much liberationist interpretation that seeks to put "history" to the service of "theology." He shows the different sorts of challenges posed for reflection by the "Moses of history" (whoever he might have been) and the "Moses of the text." What is most refreshing about Levenson is that he actually seems to know the difference!

In "The Eighth Principle of Judaism and the Literary Simultaneity of Scripture," Levenson brilliantly demonstrates the difference between an "historical awareness" concerning the texts, and the use of a historical paradigm to control their interpretation. The rabbis were capable of recognizing historical development in texts, but that did not confuse them concerning the unitary authority of Torah as a whole, nor disable them from interpreting it creatively and "critically" within that synchronic construal. The rabbis did not attempt to "fix" the history of Israel as a norm for life. Rather they allowed diverse and contradictory texts to speak variously to the living of life before God. Engaging these texts, they continued a conversation that in principle resisted "fixing" or closure. Such a relationship between community and texts, quite apart from the anti-Semitism built into so much Christian "biblical theology," helps make clear why "Jews," as Levenson entitles another essay, "are not interested in biblical theology," for such Christian "biblical theology" has in the last century seldom proceeded without attempting to base itself on some sort of historical "fixing."

Levenson's aligning of the dominant "historical model" of scholarship to distinctively Protestant theological preoccupations is perceptive, and a useful reminder that, like Judaism, the Catholic tradition has never demanded or even required "history" as an indispensable epistemological key to theology. The greater

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part of the Catholic tradition of interpretation recognized the limitations of that mode of knowing called the historical (valuable in its own way but never able to escape the probable), basing its theology on the Irenaean tripod of rule of faith, canon of Scripture, and apostolic authority. If to my taste that tradition paid far too little attention to the revelation of God in human lives and events, it at least did not attach its teaching to the fragile vessel of historiography posing as theology.

Burton Mack and Brevard Childs demonstrate in their books, though in markedly different ways, the pertinence of Levenson's critique, and show how, for all its sophistication, contemporary biblical scholarship often misses either real history or authentic theology by confusing the two enterprises.

Mack's *The Lost Gospel* represents an extension and popularization of his earlier *Myth of Innocence* (Fortress), by taking as its premise that there is no "big bang" at the origin of Christianity—no heroic Jesus, and certainly no "resurrection experience"—but only a loose congeries of movements and cults associated with Jesus or "the Christ," that only progressively (especially under the impetus of Mark's Gospel) found a shared "Myth of Origins" and therefore normative shape. His starting point is not startlingly different from that of many of his colleagues. He has simply made the grounding of a shared method explicit and therefore challenging. Mack should be applauded for developing this premise with such consistency that its fundamental wrongheadedness can be appreciated.

It is important to remember that Mack wants readers to perceive him as the soberest of hardheaded historians—no flight to faith, here, no fantasies of theology. Let's follow, then, his argument. First, the "Lost Gospel" is not the discovery of a new document, but the decision to treat that material in the Gospels found in Matthew and Luke but not found in Mark—traditionally designated Q (for *Quelle*=source) as though it were the most important clue to Christian origins. Mack would like to find in it the story of a community associated with the "Jesus movement" somewhere in Galilee over a period of thirty years after the death of Jesus: indeed, he claims to trace the *development* of that community structurally and ideologically from a loose table-fellowship that traded Jesus-quips as an expression of countercultural consciousness and collegiality to an increasingly beleaguered and apocalyptic sectarian claimant to the heritage of Israel.

To find this, the following assumptions are necessary: (1) the material found in Matthew and Luke but not in Mark come from the same source; (2) what we now have from that source is all it ever contained; (3) the original form of that source can be reconstructed by omitting the alterations and emendations made by Matthew and Luke when they used it as a source; (4) the document thus reconstituted contains the sole literature of a specific social movement—they read nothing else and held no other beliefs than were in this composition; (5) it is possible to demarcate *stages* in the redaction of Q according to the principles of literary analysis: materials of Q1 with Cynic-type sayings (that is, sayings that resemble those of the popular Hellenizing philosophical movement of that name) cannot intermingle with Q2 with its rules and rejection motifs, and certainly not with Q3 with its mythologization; (6) these stages of redaction, in turn, correspond *exactly* to stages in this hypothetical community's "development"; (7) this movement is evidence for the earliest form of Christianity, untouched by rival groups such as the "Jerusalem Church" or the "Christ Cult"; (8) it was the "Christ Cult" that mythologized the death and Resurrection of Jesus; (9) Mark's Gospel combined these streams with the Christian "Myth of Innocence."

So mesmerizing is this progression, and so similar to the procedure of well-respected researchers—say, in the Johannine literature—that only when the dust clears is it apparent that the entire show has been the purest flimflam. Not only has no positive historical evidence been adduced for this supposed movement in this supposed place and in this supposed progression, but the argument has been based on the most arbitrary sort of judgments concerning communities and texts, and on the suppression of contrary evidence (from Paul and Acts, for example—not to mention compositions such as Hebrews and James). Most of all, it simply shifts the question of "origination" to an even more obscure level: if there is no "founder" or "founding experience," how do we account for so many and such diverse communities gathered in this name?

Mack's is not the sort of historical analysis that stands up to close scrutiny. It is closer to a kind of historical imagining that is itself mythic in character. Mack should also be thanked for making this clear in his epilogue. For after his dismantling of the church's myth of origins by means of his "historical method," he makes clear that he would prefer his reconstruction to have normative effect. He repeats the substance of his final chapter in *Myth* which blames all the sins of the West and especially America, and especially Ronald Reagan, on the normative Christian gospel. Society would be much better off if Q were taken as normative, with a "Jesus movement" characterized by the Cynic counterculturalism of the early days. Meager history reveals itself as thin theology.

It is unfortunate and perhaps unfair to include Brevard Childs in such company, for if Childs's decades-long and heroic effort to restore "biblical theology" to some coherence and credibility must receive some criticism, and be regarded as a noble venture flawed in possibly mortal fashion, it nevertheless deserves respect as an effort filled with a nobleness of purpose and weight of learning. Childs represents precisely a biblical scholarship that has consciously chosen to remain within the context of the church's faith and in the service of theology. Its failure, then, to escape the distorting effects of academicism and epistemological monism (historical knowing=all knowing) stands as a particularly sober reminder of their pervasive power.

The present book completes a series of studies that began in 1970 with Childs's *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Westminster).

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In a number of articles and in three other volumes, he has sought to combine historical analysis and theology through an approach that has come to be called "canonical criticism." Moving away from the fragmentation of the Old Testament so typical of the historians of Ancient Israel, Childs sought to preserve the significance of the final redaction of texts as well as their placement within the collection. In contrast to literary critics, however, Childs has also insisted on the significance of the redactional layers revealed by biblical texts, which, he thinks, is part of their canonical character. Childs has therefore sought to unite history and texts in what amounts to a textual history. What he finds theologically important is not a reconstructed history of Israel or of nascent Christianity, but rather the history of the developments of traditions such as they are reflected in the compositions of the Old and New Testaments. He hopes to find in the strands of tradition the development of faith traditions in Israel and Christianity.

The present volume is large both in size and in ambition. After an opening historical survey of biblical theology as a discipline and a sketch of his own canonical approach, Childs turns to "the discrete witness of the Old Testament" and the "discrete witness of the New Testament," in which he rehearses the contents and critical issues pertaining to the biblical traditions. The operative term is traditions. Childs does not deal specifically with compositions, but with themes and developments that run diachronically through various compositions. In one of the most fruitful parts of the book, Childs then exemplifies the spirit of his method by two exegetical exercises on the Akedah ("binding of Isaac") and the Parable of the Wicked Tenants. The truly distinctive aspect of this book, however, is Childs's attempt to make the turn from historical analysis to biblical theology to dogmatic theological reflection. He proceeds thematically through doctrinal topics, from the identity of God through Christ the Lord to ethics. For each topic, Childs pulls together the diverse witnesses of the Old and New Testaments, then synthesizes these witnesses into a "Biblical Theological Reflection," and then "Dogmatic Theological Reflection."

From the start, Childs's work has won admiration and severe criticism. Everyone recognizes him as a fine reader of texts and astonishingly learned, as well as a scholar whose desire to serve theology is genuine. At the same time, more than a few observers have noticed the conceptual shakiness that has attended his massive volumes. Childs has never been able to make perfectly clear what he means. In this volume, he continues to try to clarify and respond to his critics, sometimes with an edge.

And some of the problems inherent in his approach from the beginning here appear in acute form. Most obvious is the academic character of his work. In sharp contrast to his revered teacher, Van Rad, Childs has always begun with the *status questionis* posed by current scholarship rather than directly with the problems posed by the texts themselves. This has required him to stay abreast of everything written if he is to stay in the conversation on his own terms. But, as noted above, that has become impossible even for so indefatigable a reader. The present volume shows the results: despite including in his text a barrage of names that must be absolutely bewildering to any reader uninitiated into this debate, and despite continuing to supply endless (and valuable) bibliographies on every conceivable topic, Childs in fact has not kept abreast of important developments (e.g., in the literary criticism of the Gospels, especially Luke-Acts), and, in a sign of fatigue, shows some irritation toward recent contributions.

Childs's more significant difficulties are directly connected to his attempt to wed history and theology. The very massiveness of his efforts suggest their futility. No matter how much Childs protests what he *wants* to do, he never seems able to let go of the historical and engage the theological: even his "dogmatic" reflections tend to fall into reviews of scholarship. This may result from his lacking a genuinely theological imagination; certainly there is more earnestness than brilliance in these discussions. But he never seems to have grasped that what theology engages is the Living God who is encountered in human experience, and that what theology requires for the discernment and interpretation of these encounters is not an account of how compositions or themes developed, much less what scholars have had to say about these things; what theology requires is a living conversation with all these texts in all their diversity and irreducible particularity. Childs's attempt to synthesize witnesses into a package called "biblical theology" actually *resists* rather than enables such a conversation.

In sum, Mack shows how bad biblical scholarship can get and yet be published by a major press with enthusiastic blurbs; Childs shows how not even noble aspirations and amazing effort can create clear thinking; Levenson shows that even in a dark season there is reason to hope. Perhaps the conceptual confusion of history and theology found in so much biblical scholarship might indeed yet be clarified. □

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Critics' choices for Christmas

Alice McDermott

Alice McDermott is the author of three novels, including most recently At Weddings and Wakes *(Farrar, Straus & Giroux). She lives in Maryland.*

I've always admired the single-mindedness of writers who read nothing else while working on their own books, but for me, reading is the best antidote I know of for the inevitable, why-am-I-doing-this? *angst* that strikes at various times during the composition of a novel. Reading, after all, is what got me into this profession in the first place and so it seems only natural that I turn, and return, to good books whenever I need to be reminded just what in the world this profession is all about.

William Trevor's *Two Lives* (Penguin, $10, 375 pp.) served as such a reminder for me this year. First published in hardcover in 1991, the book consists of two marvelous short novels, *Reading Turgenev* and *My House in Umbria*. I often turn to Trevor's work when I want to remember something about compassion for character (which means, of course, compassion for us all) and eloquence of voice, and *Two Lives* is clearly among his best work.

Because I also teach, I'm always on the lookout for short stories that will provide my writing students with the same recollection of purpose that I often need myself. This year brought a treasure trove in Reynolds Price's *The Collected Stories* (Atheneum, $25, 625 pp.). These fifty stories, written over four decades, are all marked by Price's careful structure and beautifully measured voice. They are arranged, he says in his introduction, for "the reader's well-tended pleasure," and this is indeed what they provide. I can't think of a better Christmas gift for a young writer, or for anyone who loves the short story.

Edward P. Jones's *Lost in the City* (HarperPerennial, $10, 250 pp.) is another excellent collection I know I'll be sending my students to for years to come. These stories about the African-American community in Washington, D.C., are remarkable not only for their diversity of tone, their precision of detail, but for the quiet sympathy that Jones brings to his characters and their situations. A sympathy that transcends race and circumstance and, as all good fiction must do, shows us what is true for us all.

Often, when I recommend writers to students they return the favor and this year my students directed me to Bernard Cooper's lovely collection of autobiographical essays, *Maps to Anywhere* (Penguin, $9, 139 pp.) and Barbara Esstman's lyrical first novel *The Other Anna* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, $22.95, 352 pp.). I also enjoyed Susan Pepper Robbins's *One Way Home* (Random House, $17, 175 pp.), a funny first novel about motherhood.

But I cannot recall my reading life this past year without mentioning Vladimir Nabokov's *Pnin*. For years now, I've been slowly working my way through Nabokov's writing, from the stories to the criticism and each of the novels, and this year I read, and then reread and then read again *Pnin*. It is a delight—every sentence of it—and all the reminder any struggling writer might need of what in the world this profession is all about.

Regina Plunkett Dowling

Regina Plunkett Dowling, the former chaplain of Saint Joseph College in West Hartford, Connecticut, is currently a graduate student in the Department of Religious Studies at Yale University.

Have mercy on the baseball fan in your house. Sure, she is feigning interest in other sports these days—how will Duke University fare in the post-Bobby Hurley era?—while deep down she is counting the days until spring training. Unless, of course, she is a Mets fan, struggling to erase from her memory the depravities committed on the field and off by her team (by which we see, dear children, what the generation before the Flood must have been like...). Wilfrid Sheed is a Mets fan, but his memoir, *My Life As a Fan* (Simon & Schuster, $20, 221 pp.) mercifully dwells on falling in love with the game as an adolescent. Sheed's rueful affection for his younger self, together with his vital portraits of players and pennant races, make him the ideal companion for dark January days.

Years ago, an acquaintance of mine, raised in holy secular innocence in Calif-

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ornia asked me, "So, you're a Catholic—does that mean you don't drink?" This cross-cultural misunderstanding I quickly remedied, in word if not in deed. You don't have to be Catholic (or Irish) to appreciate *Real Beer and Good Eats* (Knopf, $23, 354 pp.), just a good cook and an unpretentious one. Authors Bruce Aidells and Denis Kelly celebrate the recent renaissance of local breweries throughout the United States, first leading the reader through a historical tour of ante-Prohibition America, when local breweries flourished. Along the way they supply dozens of recipes for traditional pub-food, many of which feature beer as an ingredient. At home, we have blessed them for their meatloaf recipe (*Nancy's Spicy Meatloaf with Beer,* page 260); on the road, at least one academic conference has been redeemed by a timely visit to a commended beer-garden.

As a new graduate student, I find myself so dazed by the steady torrent of academic prose, that in my rare moments of free time I take refuge in picture books. *Giotto: The Scrovegni Chapel, Padua* (George Braziller, $22.50, 119 pp.) allows the reader to linger over the artist's forty luminous frescoes (narrating the lives of the Virgin and of Christ), each reproduced in full color. Like Dante, his contemporary, Giotto was a keen and subtle interpreter of Scripture, plumbing hidden depths in small scenes and in sustained narrative. In the panel on the Nativity, the cow gazes on the Child with a singularly cow-like wonder; Mary shelters the Child in her arms, her posture an innocent foreshadowing of the *pietà*; Joseph is sunk in a dream, receiving the angel's warning to flee to Egypt, and in the foreground a lamb stares out at the viewer, inviting her to behold the Lamb of God. The frescoes illuminate our reading of the Word, and of ourselves.

The beloved Word is also big business, as any Bible publisher will tell you. Happily, this decade has seen the publication of two splendid study Bibles, uniting faithful, supple translations to intelligent commentary. *The Catholic Study Bible* (Oxford, $30, 2,228 pp.) published in 1990, has already proved its worth to me many times over. My dog-eared copy reflects hours spent in class-preparation, liturgy-planning, private reading, sermon-writing, and theological study. Using the New American Bible translation for both Testaments (including the revised, 1986 version of the New Testament), this edition offers a five-hundred-page Reader's Guide, composed by editor Donald Senior, C.P., together with some of the best Catholic commentators working today.

The publication this fall of *The HarperCollins Study Bible* (HarperCollins, $40, 2,355 pp.) marks the first time the New Revised Standard Version, an important ecumenical translation, has appeared with new notes and commentary. Produced by the Society of Biblical Literature under the editorship of Wayne Meeks, the commentary is the work of scholars drawn from diverse Christian traditions, as well as Judaism, although Protestant scholars dominate. In this irenic age, when most of the ancient battles have happily been laid to rest, Roman Catholic readers can welcome this bountiful harvest of Protestant exegesis. Because the NRSV translation is approved by the Catholic bishops for liturgical use, and because no one commentary could ever exhaust the riches of a scriptural text, the *HarperCollins Study Bible* should be regarded as a perfect complement to the *Catholic Study Bible,* the two taking their proper place at the center of private and parish libraries.

Martin E. Marty

Martin E. Marty is the Fairfax M. Cone Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago and senior editor of the Christian Century.

Most of us who are disciplined by a discipline and subject to a subject matter, as I am to history and American religion, welcome a day off, or a season off. When we give or suggest books for Christmas reading, therefore, a welcome opportunity comes to review the year as it came and went, away from the desk, the study, the library. Here, then, are my non-American religious history highlights, books that moved me that I would like to move toward others.

First, Donald Hall's *Life Work* (Beacon, $15, 134 pp.). Hall is one of our more notable poets; his *The Museum of Clear Ideas* has been one of the works I have enjoyed reading while disenjoying the act of stepping on my basement step-machine. *Life Work* is an extremely modest, rather meandering journal, an elaboration of Hall's sense of vocation as a writer. What separates it from any number of pretty good such efforts is his very good accounting

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of what happens when a fulfilled writer's *Life Work* gets interrupted and overshadowed by a life-threatening, indeed dooming form of cancer. Hall mingles fear and love, hope and anguish, doubt and faith as he does his elaborating. I particularly liked his comments on what one reads at such a point in life; the Gospel of John is one of his recommendations. Why not: *Life Work* and the Gospel of John as my first dual-selection?

Another poet who turns to prose for one book, a spiritual match for Don Hall, is Kathleen Norris, whose *Dakota* (Ticknor and Fields, $19.95, 192 pp.) I have given to so many people that to write this column I had to phone the bookstore to get publication data. Norris, an Easterner and urbanite, finds herself with her husband on an inherited farm in western South Dakota, near where the world ends, or where one can see it end, if one takes the New Yorker's vantage. Norris surveys the bleak prairie landscape, one that I know from childhood, and, like so many others, turns it into both a metaphor and the landscape for spiritual adventure. A Benedictine monastery down the road provides a hospice for her spirit, but she also engages town people who know nothing of her poetry and turns their encounters into fodder for her spiritual reflection, and ours.

While still on the prairies, I must make another stop, this time at the door of Willa Cather, whose editions I collect. Far from being captive of the prairie vision—if, indeed, that spacious vision induces captivity—Cather is taken seriously by French critics, specialists in gendered genres, and neopostdeconstructuralists alike. Now one of her prairie classics is first in a scholarly edition of her corpus: *O Pioneers!* (University of Nebraska, $45, 391 pp.). The editors (Susan J. Rosowski, Charles W. Mignon, and Kathleen Danker) have produced a "definitive critical text," provided a historical essay, and added the kinds of textual apparatus, commentary, emendations, and the like that help certify the importance of the work and demonstrate the care Cather gave it. Fortunately, the final product is so clean and clear and uncluttered that its medium still matches the message of Cather's original from 1913. Spouse Harriet and I read the novel to each other a couple of years ago and saw two middling television reworkings of its story; it became all but urgent to reread it with all the fixings, and I commend it for holiday reading.

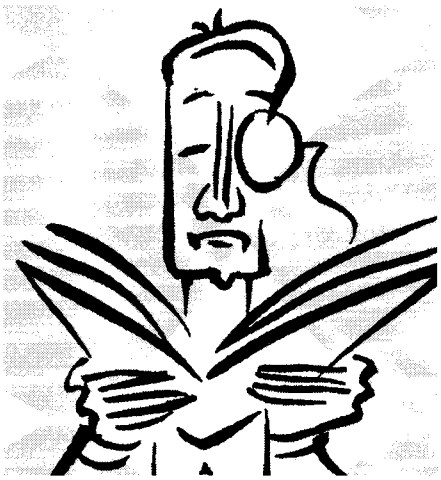
The paperback of Nicholas Boyle's *Goethe: The Poet and the Age: Volume I: The Poetry of Desire* (Oxford, $18.95, 807 pp.) is getting to be two years old by now, but it took me several seasons, climaxed by a reading experience at a mountain retreat in the Cascades, the proper setting for taking on Goethe, to finish it. If you have seasons and retreats, you might take it along for an immersion in nature and poetry alike.

And there should be one big book for tea table at Christmas; this year you might think of placing there, and opening regularly, Courtney Milne, *The Sacred Earth* (Abrams, $49.50, 244 pp.), fortunately captioned commonsensically, and not in the gaseous prose one associates with the New Age argot to which authors of many books such as this are tempted to turn. Milne lets the pictures of sites sacred to many faiths speak for themselves, in color, and this they do, effectively.

Wilson J. Moses

Wilson J. Moses is a professor of history at Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania. He is the author of Alexander Crummell: A Study of Civilization and Its Discontents *(Oxford).*

I recently conversed with an agreeable young graduate student at one of our top-ranked national universities, who expressed a sincere enthusiasm for the culture of African-Americans. We had not talked long before I discovered that his interest in black American life was limited almost exclusively to popular culture, and that he conceived popular culture as something that had begun around the time of his birth in 1969. Thus, in his view, the most interesting aspects of African-American life were those that had sprung up since the deaths of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., cultural expressions associated with break-dancing, rap routines, and athletic shoes. It wasn't his fault. The theory of black culture, as it is taught in many universities, is dominated by a scatological tradition of street-corner jesting, prison anthropology, and novels that portray black American family life as if it were unremittingly pathological.



Claudia Tate, author of *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: The Black Heroine's Text at the Turn of the Century* (Oxford, $35, 312 pp.) is striving mightily to correct such views. Tate provides a fresh, provocative reading of black women's writing, and reveals a great deal about the aspirations of stable working-class black people during the nadir of the segregation era. Tate demonstrates that late nineteenth-century African-American women, living in the aftermath of slavery, emulated, without mindlessly imitating, a set of values based on the ideal of nuclear families, with males as the principal breadwinners. Tate is a feminist, and by no means does she offer patriarchalism as the solution to the problems of black Americans—past or present. The importance of her work is that it is a forceful corrective to the anti-historicism that disparages nuclear "family values" and mocks the heroic struggles of the black middle class.

Eric Sundquist's *To Wake the Nations* (Harvard, $29.95, 720 pp.) is another discussion of the values of literate black Americans. His approach is to focus on the interdependence of black and white life and literature, which he views as one continuous weave. He argues for viewing the interdependence of Anglo-American and Afro-American traditions as the basis of a new conception of American

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culture. Like Tate, Sundquist does much to undermine older class-based clichés concerning black American culture. He demonstrates the pervasiveness of an emerging cultural code throughout America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As one of his tropes, Sundquist uses the cakewalk, a form of "grand cotillion," a stylized adaptation of white middle-class dance steps, with satirical overtones. For Sundquist the cakewalk symbolizes the ability of black folk to gracefully and humorously assume the forms of white middle-class culture, without becoming cultural slaves.

David Lewis approaches some of the same questions in his *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race* (Henry Holt, $35, 735 pp.). For historians to utilize biography as a means of approaching larger issues of culture and society is a common device. Du Bois invited such an interpretation of his life when he gave his 1940 biography the title, *Dusk of Dawn: The Autobiography of a Race Concept*. Lewis's project involved the reading of Du Bois's voluminous autobiographical writings, as well as his unpublished manuscripts and reams of correspondence. Du Bois embodied many of the contradictions of the black middle class, having risen from lowly origins to become an exemplar of the stuffiness traditionally imputed to the black bourgeoisie. He evolved into a Marxist social critic, but never abandoned his bourgeois tastes and mannerisms. Du Bois was, as he seemed to insist, a representative man in that he represented the complexities of black middle-class culture, so often ignored in attempts to define black American values.

Lewis's work represents the ironies and intricacies that will always be discovered by scholars who seek to reveal the complexity of African-American life and culture. Far too many contemporary treatments of gender, race, and class are little more than politically correct homilies, liberally sprinkled with deconstructionist jargon. By contrast, the studies of Lewis, Sundquist, and Tate are written in refreshingly uncomplicated style, and lead toward a more sophisticated appreciation of the spiritual strivings of black men and women than is commonly fashionable.

Nicholas R. Clifford

Nicholas R. Clifford teaches Chinese history at Middlebury College in Middlebury, Vermont. His first novel, The House of Memory, *will be published by Ballantine next spring.*

Three books about China lead off, all of them written for the general reader rather than the specialist. Jung Chang's *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* (Anchor, $14, 524 pp.) is, I think, the best of an ever growing number of memoirs of life in Maoist China, and in particular of the painful years between the antirightist movement of 1957 which saw the removal of tens of thousands of intellectuals from public life, teaching, and writing, through the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and the gradual openness that began after Mao's death. Chang's book is more than that, however, for she looks at China's history in this century through three generations of women in her family: her Manchurian grandmother, concubine to a warlord; her mother, a Communist activist; and herself, growing up in the Maoist years, and coming of age in the Cultural Revolution. There is enough background so that the person unfamiliar with China will not feel lost, and Chang, who now lives in England, writes touchingly about a revolution that turned on and destroyed many of the very people who had given their lives to it.

Bette Bao Lord's *Legacies: A Chinese Mosaic* (Fawcett, $10, 245 pp.) has roughly the same theme, though this time the author is the daughter of refugees from Shanghai, and her book intersperses the brief life histories of roughly a dozen Chinese with a look at her own experience as a Chinese-American married to a career diplomat who would become U.S. ambassador to China, leaving just weeks before the bloody events of June 1989. Here again are the stories of men and women who gave themselves to the construction of a new society, gradual-

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ly coming to realize, though not always admit, that something terribly wrong was happening to the revolution. Again, as with so many books of this sort, there is a tragic sense of waste in the destruction of the hopes and careers of an enormously talented people.

Ever since Marco Polo, books about living and traveling in China have exerted a fascination for the West. One of the best of recent years is Rosemary Mahoney's *Early Arrival of Dreams: A Year in China* (Fawcett, $10, 325 pp.) Mahoney, just out of Harvard, spent a year teaching English in Hangzhou. She records her life and her impressions there in a beautifully written work that, among other things, captures the essence of what it is to be a foreigner, and therefore an exotic—wondered at, admired, distrusted—in a country little used to conceptions of diversity and multiculturalism. Recording talks with her students and fellow teachers, she manages to be sympathetic without losing her own grounding, and avoids giving in to the common temptation of using her brief acquaintance with a small corner of China to generalize about a huge country of more than a billion people.

Now, two books that have nothing to do with China. I found Jay Tolson's *Pilgrim in the Ruins: A Life of Walker Percy* (Simon and Schuster, $27.50, 544 pp.) a wonderfully interesting study of a writer I admire. The book is particularly interesting for its analysis of Percy's relationships with a variety of friends, relations, and mentors (such as Caroline Gordon, Shelby Foote, Eudora Welty, and perhaps most important, his wife, Bunt) as he developed his art. It seems to me, as a historian, a model of what literary biography should be, skillfully and sympathetically integrating Percy's religious and philosophical ideas into his literary work. Finally, like so many others, I have been haunted by Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (Knopf, $21, 307 pp.), that extraordinarily beautiful and evocative book about love, memory, and identity in the wake of a war that has moved on, leaving behind its wreckage and human attempts to rebuild what has been destroyed.

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Christopher Thomas

Christopher Thomas teaches in the Department of Art History at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada.

Witold Rybczynski, author of *Looking Around: A Journey Through Architecture* (HarperCollins, $24.95, 301 pp.), is blessed with wonderful common sense, the sense to make the common interesting and unexpectedly profound. Although he is a professor of architecture (formerly at McGill and now at the University of Pennsylvania), his books are accessible to the lay reader. In *The Most Beautiful House in the World* (1989) he wrote about building a house for himself. In *Home: A Short History of an Idea* (1986) he explored the history of an institution that has come to seem "natural" but is in fact rooted in artificial (if attractive) ideas (the home as a cozy refuge from the world). In *Waiting for the Weekend* (1991) he used a similar approach in writing about the weekend as a time of rest and refreshment.

All of Rybczynski's recent books have been published by Viking in small, appropriately comfortable formats that make for easy reading in bed or, well, in a soft chair in one's home on the weekend. Rybczynski is the best kind of academic—one who communicates with the public simply and unpretentiously.

Looking Around is a collection of critical articles he has written for a variety of periodicals since the mideighties. Several deal with housing, his recurring preoccupation and a subject which, he notes, deserves more attention than it generally gets from architects, who like to devote themselves to glitzier, more prestigious programs. Nothing could be more important after the past neoconservative decade, however, than the provision of affordable, agreeable housing. Other pieces are reviews of important buildings and trends, for example the new "old" town of Seaside, Florida, and its many progeny; Michael Graves's Portland Building, which caused such a stir in the early eighties and introduced "postmodernism" to the public; and a number of the new art museums that are a virtual leitmotif of the decade. Like Rybczynski's earlier books, this one imparts a lot of architectural lore and literacy in a straightforward, painless way.

Garry Wills is probably best known for his canny, well-researched analyses of presidential (and near-presidential) character like the prophetic *Nixon Agonistes* (1970), which appeared two years before

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Watergate; *The Kennedy Imprisonment*, of 1982, on Teddy; and the excellent *Reagan's America: Innocents at Home* (1987). In *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words that Remade America* (Touchstone, $12, 317 pp.), which won a Pulitzer Prize, Wills turns back to a rather more impressive president, one almost universally acknowledged as a statesman and first-class human being. He concludes that Lincoln, by sheer power of intellect and rhetoric, gave Americans a spiritual and ideological "new birth" that remains normative even today.

In 272 vivid, carefully chosen words Lincoln succeeded in convincing his audience (which, thanks to the telegraph and newspapers, soon meant all Americans) that their nation had been founded not on a pragmatic, temporizing Constitution but on perduring ideals embodied in the Declaration of Independence. Probably most Americans accept that idea without much question today, but in its time it was relatively novel. True child of Transcendentalism and the Greek Revival that he was, Lincoln sought to root America in an idea, and for better and worse such idealism has continued to rule American life and government, justifying everything from the Civil War to the Gulf War and from free silver to health-care reform. Woven into Wills's exposition of this idea are brief, engaging accounts of the rural cemetery movement, antebellum philosophy, the classical funeral oration, and other topics. This again is history at its living best, with thought-provoking implications for the present.

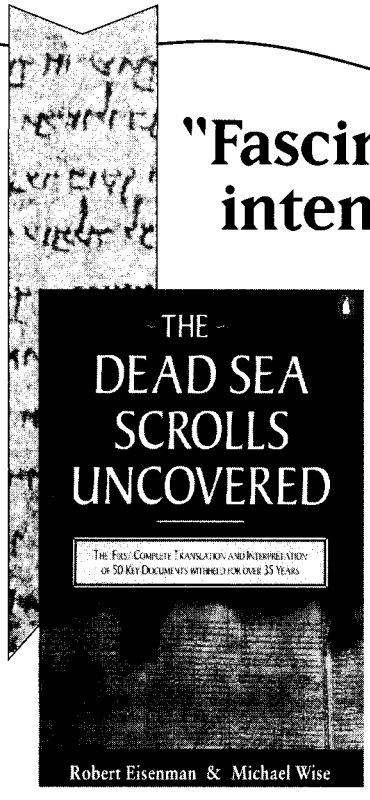
E.J. Dionne, Jr.

E.J. Dionne, Jr., writes for the editorial page of the Washington Post. *He is the author of* Why Americans Hate Politics *(Simon & Schuster).*

It was hard to believe that the world needed yet another book on any member of the Kennedy family. It's a tribute to Richard Reeves's *President Kennedy: Profile of Power* (Simon & Schuster, $30, 798 pp.) that it is not only a superb biography, but also a much needed work.

I'd have thought it impossible to touch the subject of the Kennedys without being partisan or ideological or angry or moralistic or hagiographical. Reeves's achievement is that he allows us simultaneously to understand why Kennedy is revered by so many today for the spirit he seemed to embody and also why so many have highlighted the flaws of a man who had, to put it gently, his share of flaws. This is also a gripping book; I found myself reading well past 2 A.M. without realizing what I had done to my next morning.

For those inclined to pursue the biographies of ideas, Robert Booth Fowler's magnificent little book, *The Dance with Community* (University of Kansas Press, $12.95, 224 pp.), is worth a good deal of time. Few words are invoked so passionately, and for so many different purposes, as the word "community." Fowler is remarkably fair-minded in his treatment of the various iterations of the idea, and astonishing well-read. This is a book that pleases the mind (and clears it of misconceptions), while also giving nourishment to the soul.



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Jeffrey C. Isaac's *Arendt, Camus, and Modern Rebellion* (Yale University Press, $30, 304 pp.) is an inspired and inspiring book. Isaac sees Hannah Arendt and Albert Camus as laying the basis for a democratic radicalism that offers an ethical alternative to the failures of Marxism and the weaknesses of liberalism.

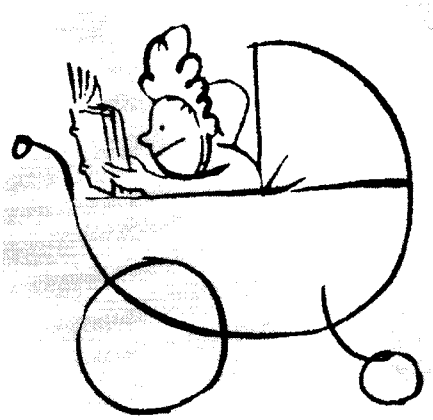
Two books are recommended as gifts to more secular-minded liberals who need to be shaken up a bit. Stephen Carter's *The Culture of Disbelief* (Basic Books, $25, 320 pp.) challenges liberal prejudices against religion. James Q. Wilson's *The Moral Sense* (Free Press, $22.95, 313 pp.) suggests that some moral truths can be self-evident and also necessary. Wilson's book is almost a reiteration of the ethical reflections of C.S. Lewis, run through the word-processor of a social scientist who writes well.

For those who love mysteries and thrillers as much as I do (I've been devoted to them since I discovered the Hardy Boys at age ten), I pass along three delightful discoveries. William G. Tapply has created a superb series of mysteries built around a lawyer and fly-fisherman named Brady Coyne. These are Boston tough-guy books that owe a debt to Robert B. Parker's Spenser series. Tapply's latest, *The Snake Eater* (Otto Penzler Books, $20, 273 pp.) is especially good. Donald Honig has written a couple of excellent baseball thrillers, *The Plot to Kill Jackie Robinson* (Signet, $4.99, 367 pp.) and *Last Man Out* (New American Library $19, 230 pp.). Finally, I may be the last person in America to have discovered Tony Hillerman; his Navajo tribal police books are as good as everyone says.

Peggy Ellsberg

Peggy Ellsberg teaches at Barnard College in New York City. Her writing has appeared in the New York Times Magazine, *among other publications.*

For those who will be shopping for young children this Christmas, the bookstores are a good place to start. Even babies, especially if they find themselves born into a household of readers, will want books. The wonderful board



books by Helen Oxenbury (*Baby Board Books*, Simon & Schuster, $3.95 each, *Big Board Books*, Macmillan: Aladdin Books, $4.95 each), are perennial favorites among babies who like to read but who still tend to hold books upside down or who cannot resist tearing out pages. Oxenbury's Baby Board books (five volumes) and her Big Board books (four volumes) are composed of brilliantly simple and colorful line drawings of infants and young toddlers doing recognizable things—clapping, waving, holding toys. These drawings are articulate upside-up or upside-down, thanks to their simplicity; and being "board" books, they are made of virtually indestructible thick cardboard which can be dragged anywhere by a crawler, and then washed with a wet sponge.

My one-year-old daughter's apparent favorite is one of the smaller and thus more portable Baby Board books called *Dressing*. In it, the famous Oxenbury baby—who quite resembles my son at a certain stage of his early life, when he was plump, rosy, and bald—appears on one page wearing a diaper and on the next adds a shirt and on the next overalls, then shoes, then a hat. Fully dressed, he smiles at the reader. My daughter does not tire of reading this book over and over, with its perfect progression of plot and its concise closure.

The Oxenbury board books have been around for over a dozen years, but more recently—in the late 1980s—her *Tom and Pippo* (Macmillan: Aladdin Books, $5.95 each) series appeared. In these, the baby has sprouted some blond hair and looks to be about two or three years old. Pippo, a stuffed monkey, goes everywhere with him. The pictures are still in the same simply adorable Oxenbury style. But the Tom and Pippo books have sentences to read, and the pages are actually made of paper: these are for the more mature baby.

Six years ago, when my son was an infant reader, the best books for babies were any of those written and illustrated by Jan and Allen Ahlberg. My particular favorites were *The Baby's Catalogue* and the masterful and lyrical *Peek-a-Boo*, set in wartime England and illustrated with chaotic period scenes—an outdoor loo, a victory garden, a blimp, a tremendous jumble of people and toys and domestic clutter crowded onto a single page, with the baby's repeated question: "What does he see?" These extraordinary books have disappeared from the booksellers' shelves, and I wish they would come back. The Ahlbergs would get a Nobel Prize, if there were a category for babies' books.

For the slightly older child, say between three and seven, I recommend the fresh-from-England tale of *Penguin Small* (Harcourt Brace & Co.: Gulliver Books, $14.95). Our hero is a young and chicken-hearted penguin who is afraid to jump into the water. His entire penguin community flees the North Pole, because they are harassed by the mean and mischievous polar bears. They all dive into the ocean and swim to Antarctica. Our poor little penguin catches up with them only after a snowman in a red and green muffler and a great blue whale help him. The characters are all ditzy and charming, but the greatest pleasure of this book resides in its terrific pictures and its surprising layout. Many of its pages offer sudden foldings-out and poppings-up.

In *The Pagemaster* (Turner Publishing, $19.95), ten-year-old Richard is a scaredy-cat (a multiphobic personality). He is afraid of everything from the possibility of earthquakes to the risk of mercury in canned tunafish. His bicycle is overly outfitted for safety. He wears a crash helmet everywhere. One day Richard stumbles into the deserted public library to take refuge from the rain. The next thing he knows, he meets book-shaped figures named Fantasy and Adventure and Horror, and each character and each story spring to life. Suddenly Richard is surrounded by flying carpets and great white whales and

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enchanted sailing ships. He meets Dr. Jekyll and he meets Frankenstein. He hangs from cliffs and wades through jungles, and encounters many characters and scenes from well-known stories. After his Outward Bound experience in the library, Richard is able to ride his bike home with no helmet (this is a dubious lesson to teach young readers), and he is fearless enough to climb the ladder to his treehouse.

The Pagemaster is graced with such beautiful and sumptuously colored illustrations by Jerry Tiritilli that readers of every age will be thrilled that there is one on each page. For the child who is in the transitional phase between reading for words and reading for pictures, this book will be quite satisfying. Each page of *The Pagemaster* is divided between normal-size type and gorgeous de La Tourishly-lit pictures. Any child between seven and twelve would love this book.

If you need a gift for a hesitant reader between the ages of six and fifteen, I would recommend the *Tintin* (Little, Brown, & Co., 21 volumes, $7.95 each) series. (Avid readers will enjoy them, too.) There are twenty-one of these classy French comic books, translated into good English. *Tintin* comic books have been entertaining French kids for many decades. You will be happy to see the child who receives this gift—a book at once sophisticated and innocent, witty and pure—howling with hilarity at the outrageous adventures and hysterical captions. My son really took off as a reader, when he was just over six years old, with *Tintin*. At first he needed an older person to read the dialogue aloud with him; but after the first volume or two, we have found him propped up in bed, wearing his blanket sleepers, and reading *Tintin*, laughing that chiming, tickled-pink, little child's laugh, a sound that we wish we could store in a bottle, because its music breaks our heart with its brief beauty. □

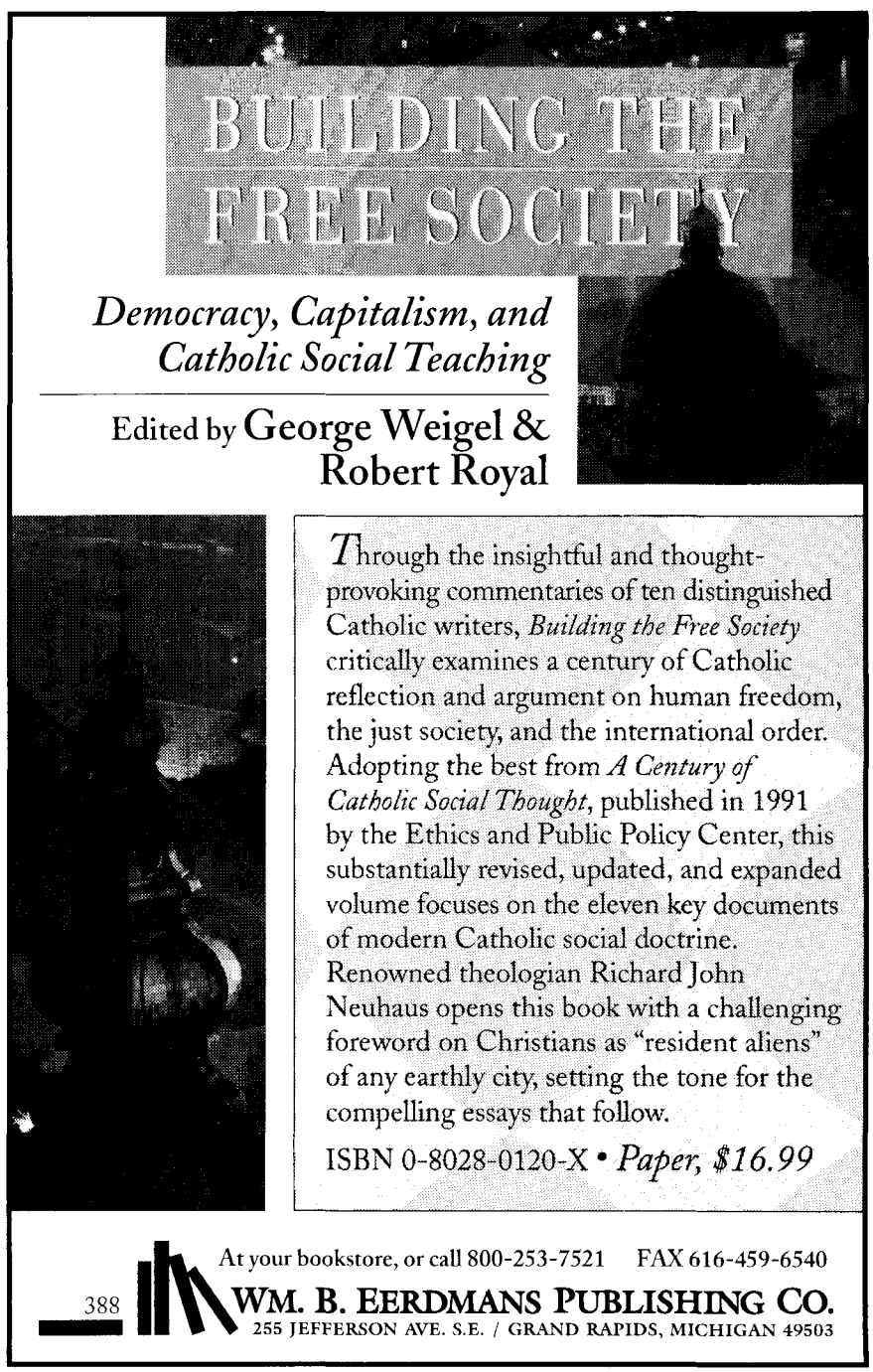
CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 2)

they, too, are a prime target for the missionary zeal of other religions. Yet we refuse participation in the priesthood to willing candidates with families of their own who might really live among and get to know the members of such communities.

The ancient monastic ideal that has been imposed upon our diocesan priests is no longer workable. No isolated priest has fraternal support available to him. And unlike the past, when we thought of the isolated priest as the pastor of a small church in a rural community, nowadays the pastor of a large city parish may find himself similarly isolated. In contemporary America it is no more than a hypocritical pretense that a priest can work effectively in the world and somehow live outside it....

When I was a boy every Catholic family hoped (the mothers prayed) for a priest-son or a nun-daughter. That is no longer so. Those strong Catholic families from which we would like our priests to come do not encourage their children to be open to religious vocations. Rightly or wrongly, many of them believe celibacy unwise or even unhealthy. Rightly or wrongly, many of them believe that the requirement of celibacy carries none of



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the practical advantages which it was once argued to carry. Rightly or wrongly, many believe that celibacy as a sacrifice made on the way to the realization of some spiritual ideal, however praiseworthy, is too stern a requirement for priests ordained today, who will probably never have an opportunity to live day-to-day in a community of similarly dedicated people. Our families do not want these problems for their children. And it goes almost without saying that the harried and burnt-out parish priest is not an inspiring vocational model, even should he have the time to make himself frequently visible to young people.

The effects of all this are observable in the seminaries, where it is reported that not only the number but the quality of aspirants to the priesthood is lower and lowering.

It is evidently and absolutely necessary to open the priesthood to people who will bring to it the most useful resources in order to provide what the very existence of dioceses and parishes promises. It seems inescapable that a logical, practical measure would be to open the priesthood to men who have arranged their lives in such a way that their lives, and their families' lives, might touch their parishioners' lives at many points.

Of immediate and urgent importance now is the need for the bishops to address these issues squarely and publicly. The refusal of the bishops even to discuss these problems breeds cynicism and dissatisfaction within the Catholic community, just as it astonishes or bemuses the public in general. How can such a refusal by the bishops be interpreted but as a lack of compassionate concern for their fellow priests? What is such a refusal but a hardening of the heart to the problems of the people?

Time flies. If the confronting of these issues is postponed much longer, it is possible that one day we might open up the priesthood and congratulate ourselves for bowing to the inevitable, only to find that there is no one outside the gate waiting to enter.

There is no authority without responsibility. Is it not the responsibility of those with apostolic authority to provide and keep open the sacerdotal channels through which God's grace can flow to his people? Could anything at all be more important? Is it more important to maintain the tradition of celibacy than to keep God's people in touch with him?

Perhaps you can look deep within your heart and respond to the Spirit who is speaking through his people.

(REV.) JOSEPH P. BREEN

Editor's note: According to the *Nashville Tennessean* [October 12], Father Breen's letter prompted disciplinary action by Bishop Edward Kmiec of Nashville. The paper reported that the bishop had required Father Breen to sign a pledge that "restricts his public statements" on the question of mandatory celibacy. In a mid-October letter to the priests of his diocese cited in the

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story, the bishop described Father Breen as "a good priest and a caring pastor" but characterized his letter to the bishops as "accusatory" and "judgmental."

The Shadow & Pat Jordan

Houston, Tex.

To the Editors: Oh, how painfully we learn the lesson of history: that evil lurks in the hearts of men (and women). The Shadow always knew, and now, so does Patrick Jordan ["A Double Mugging," November 5]. I am much relieved that Mr. Jordan did not have to pay the ultimate price of martyrdom to be faithful to his word; he's too good a journalist for us to lose. I'm sure, by the way, that the pope would gladly list mugging as an intrinsically evil act.

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